



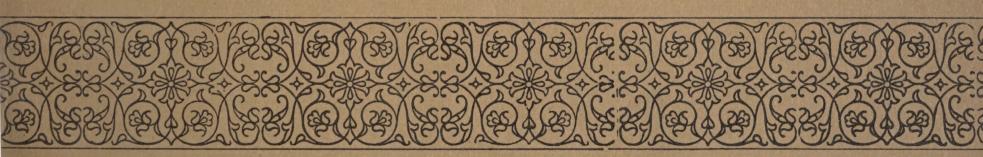


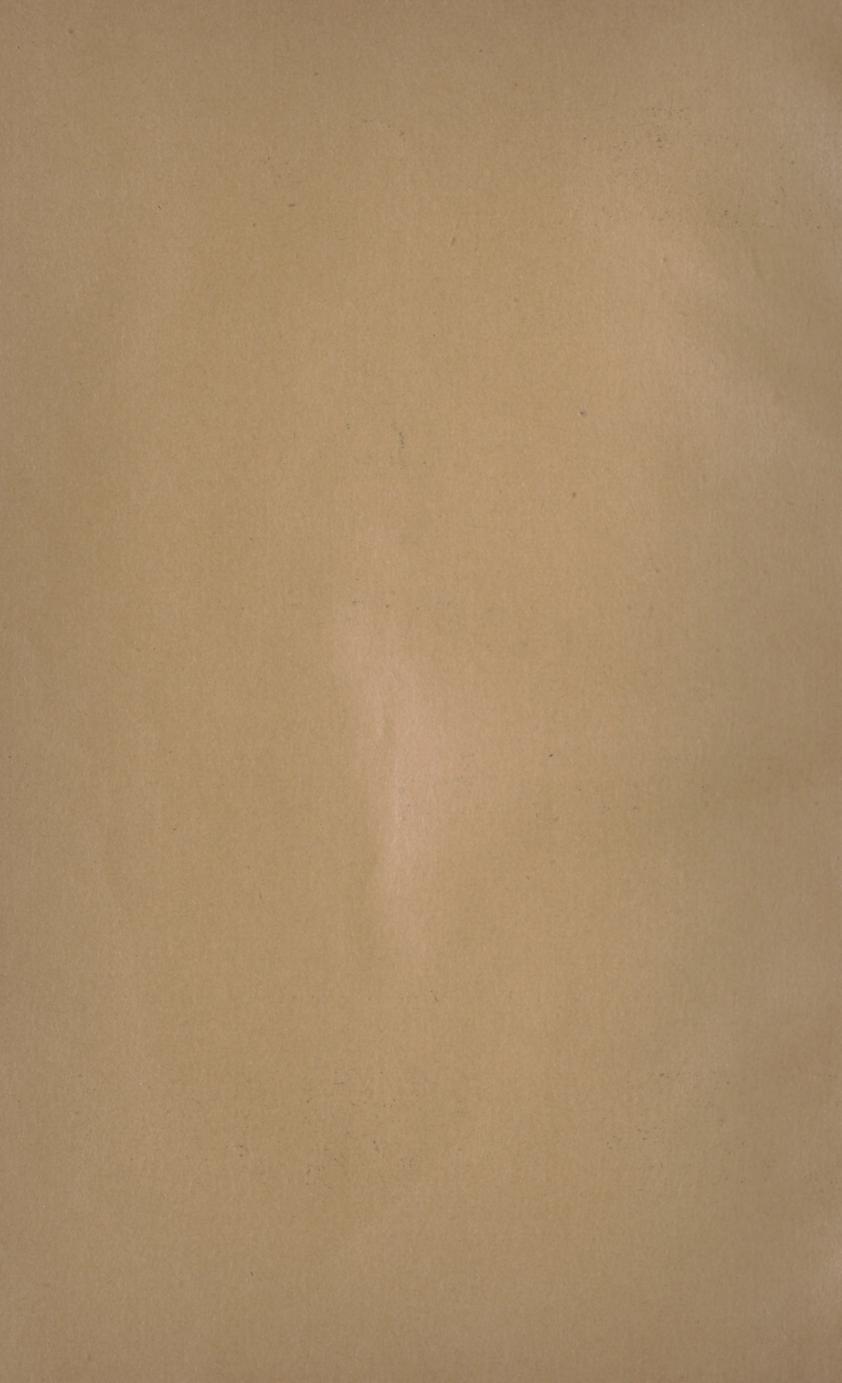


The Greatest Crime in the World

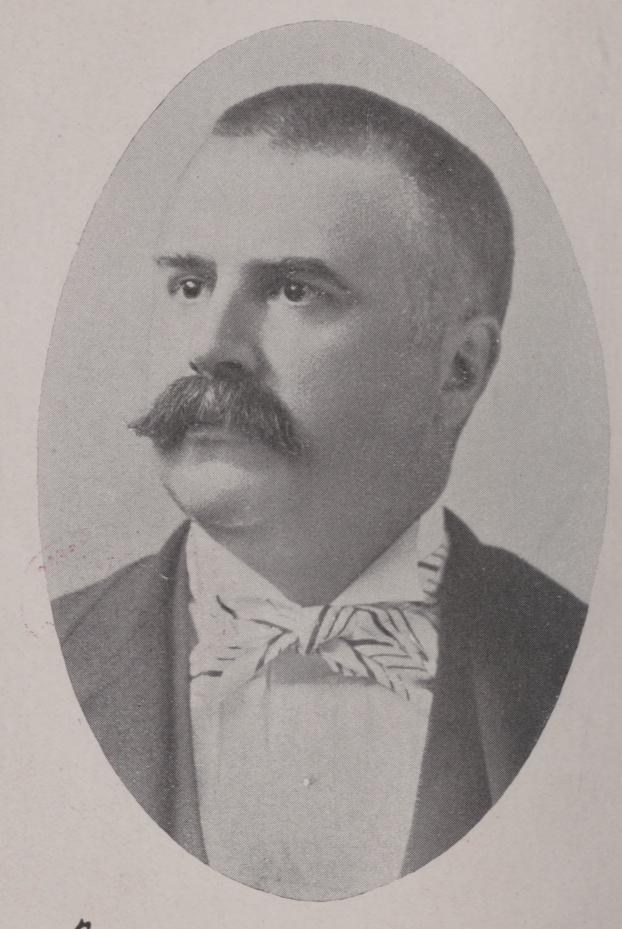
BY

WILLIAM ALBERT LEWIS









William Albert Lewis

THE

GREATEST

CRIME IN THE WORLD.

"And the Dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed."—Revelation, 12, 17.

BY

WILLIAM ALBERT LEWIS

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WHY?

I saw a huge dog spring upon a little girl and tear her abdomen till the entrails protruded. The child sank screeching in the mire, her companions flying terrified into adjacent yards, calling for their mothers. Bare-headed women hurried from back doors, sobbing, screaming, cursing, to the rescue. The dog licked his bloody chops and ambled off. I was too far removed to assist. When the women surrounded the gasping body they paled, quivered, reeled, stared, whispered, were confused, but did nothing. A red-faced, obese woman, her sleeves rolled to her elbows, arms hairy and freckled, dress front greasy and unfastened, locks thin and dishevelled, strode to the now breathless body, flung a ragged apron over the exposed intestines, picked up the remains, muttered a few curses; and, still redfaced, tearless, unmoved, steady-handed, shouted an imprecation to the crowd and trudged off to her hovel.

The child was her's.

I'll write this woman's life.

HOW?

PART ONE .- A DAY.

(A PARCEL.

BETRAYING A SECRET.

PART TWO. { THE GREATEST CRIME IN THE [WORLD.

UNFORGIVEN.

TEMPTATION.

PART THREE.—THE WRATH OF THE DRAGON.

PART FOUR.—THE WAR OF VENGEANCE.

PART FIVE.—IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

THE GREATEST CRIME IN THE WORLD.

PART ONE.

A DAY.

Resting gracefully; leaning against the window frame; holding to her lips an edge of a folded note; rolling the other edge with soft, dainty, white fingers; musing, reflecting, having happy, peace-producing thoughts; Vezia Nourse looked an exquisite type of blonde woman. Her long, flaxen hair was in one braid down her back, smoothed carefully from her broad forehead. About her neck and wrists deep linen; at her throat a tiny gold pin; a morning gown of gray fitted her slender figure, setting out its curves and proportions, displaying healthful development in a well-bred young woman of three and twenty.

The apartment was a sleeping room. The bedstead, bureau, washstand, of polished mahogany. Purest white prevailed in the furnishings. A staple straw carpet, which smelled sweet and wholesome, denoted that independence was not one of the occupants' vanities. The room and the woman betokened tidy comfort. A golden robin protested against captivity from a common black wire cage; potted plants filled the windows; a few etchings and daguerrotypes adorned the walls and mantel, books lay upon the table; a pile of sheet music upon the floor; through the windows, Beacon hill, the Common just below, and gladness of a lovely spring morning roundabout.

Vezia Nourse had bidden her room mate goodby for the day, and had taken from the hall table the letter she held in her hand and to her lips, and over which she mused pleasedly. Into her blue eyes came the expression of a soul carried upon the billowy tide of boundless thought. They had satisfaction in them; a lurking laugh; a surprise for somebody fashioning itself, but a way from taking on garb of words. She looked and acted the letter unexpected. Not unhoped-for, but unanticipated. She was not contemplating much, nor deeply. Smiles are short-lived, concentrated: wear themselves out quickly, or are frightened away. She contemplated something which made her happy; and which, by the way she folded the letter and thrust it into her bosom, she meant to keep close in her heart for the present.

She went to the table and began copying music. For a few minutes the steel nib scratched lustily without pauses; then came lulls, hesitation, cessation; a dropping of the pen and a thumb and finger poked past a red button into her bosom and the letter withdrawn and reread. She smiled, blushed, clutched it in both hands, kissed it hurriedly, and thrust it out of sight, as if fearful it would fade.

This handsome woman had received a love letter that delighted and satisfied her. Her beaming eyes, undulating bosom, parted, muttering lips, told of love thoughts. The music must remain uncopied. The task she promised Armita Holbrook, at breakfast, must go undone. Work had come to her brain she had not planned; thought-work. Love glistened over it like spangles. She couldn't hold the pen; nor keep quiet; nor see the score. Her hands became cold and twitchy; she kept thinking of Armita and the "somebody" who had written the precious letter. There were lessons to be given; hard, humdrummery lessons to new beginners; but she had no patience to stand over the Cutter children and waste an hour with their teasing blunders for a matter of a half dollar; not when that letter lay in her bosom, growing big as a trunk, taking on motion, exhaling kisses, imparting warmth. She couldn't bear it! She had to withdraw it and reread it. This time she laughed to herself:

"Poor Armita! Won't she be astounded?"

This seemed to please her greatly, for she read and laughed, and muttered over Armita's name.

The letter fell into her lap; the smile faded from her pretty mouth; she leaned an elbow on the table; placed her head in her hand, for those serious thoughts women interject into their love dreams. For some minutes she bit her lip; then a limpid horizon came in the tender eyes, predicting inundation of tears; the slippered foot tapped nervously on the floor, as when a woman's mind is perplexed. The letter was carefully folded again, kissed tenderly, with assurance nothing in the sober thoughts appertained to it; then the long, braided, luxuriance of golden hair was pulled over the shoulder and manipulated until it became a handsome coil on the regal head, and stray strands were daintily twisted around a tapering finger. Vezia resolved to go out. This hair dressing was the first step. Soon she raised the shade, said pretty nothings to the robin, drew on her gloves, fixed the shutters, passed down stairs, and onto the street.

The daguerrotypes upon the mantel were valued family portraits belonging to Miss Nourse and Miss Holbrook. The kindly-faced matron with locks smoothed before the ears, was Vezia's mother, who paid for her child's existence with her life. The stern-faced man in the wide-sleeve coat, with choker

collar, was her father; on whose account she was no longer an occupant of the ancestral home, but a music teacher in the north, far away from the old Albemarle manor where she was born. The sedate man and woman represented in contemporaneous art were Armita's father and mother, both deceased; who left her poorly fitted, with inherited weakness, to battle with life as secretary to the executive head of a great corporation. These were days when daughters away from home were not ashamed to exhibit old-fashioned portraits of their old-fashioned people; nor to observe old-fashioned ideas concerning themselves. It would be less safe, perhaps, to penetrate the boudoir of two young bachelor women today. Instead of old, illusive daguerrotypes, with their faded faces and fantastic attire, would be found portraits of the popular leading men of the newest society play; preserved gew-gaws of balls; and their own luxurious figures in reckless exposure of loveliness. Times have not changed so far as the selfdependence of women is concerned except to the woman's advantage; for in the days referred to, female employment was so restricted that Armita's engagement as secretary to the president of a corporation was as extraordinary as her enjoyment of an income enabling her to live in a fashionable section of Boston. The lives and surroundings of both Vezia and Armita confined them to the days before

numerous and altered conditions grew out of perverse and mistaken notions of civilization. These young women were happier and better because anteceding the era which malformed the body social; which disseminated fallacies of woeful import, and filled young women's minds with erroneous ideas. It was much harder then for a woman to earn her living; but women-earners were more zealous; accepting the imperative, unglossed and unqualified by what later regime has rendered congenial. The young lady secretary and young lady music teacher of thirty years ago were incalculably removed from the secretary and music teacher of today; and in and about these thirty milestones have grown ivies as fatal as they are fascinating.

As Vezia strolled down Park street the contents of the letter caused her to cogitate how to impart its happiness to Armita? These girls were devotedly attatched. For two years they had lived in the same room, slept in the same bed, shared the same notions, and spent and saved a like income. Similarity in their conditions made them frank and candid. Now had arisen that which made one of them long to be deceptive. Vezia did not want to admit that Rev. Mr. Meserve had asked her to be his wife. She did not want to concede that the offer made her happy; or that she proposed accepting it. She was at the point where a long-sustained confidence has

to be rudely shattered; where those who live in each other discover they live too much so to make secretiveness easy; where it is difficult to keep to one's self what it is equally difficult to admit. The pretty blonde organist of Burr street chapel had received this proposal of marriage from its handsome, eloquent pastor. It made her as happy as one is who receives notice of a legacy while begging a meal on the curb. This girl was not born to work. She was a Virginian: born to see work done. Her perfect hands, poised above the ivories of a keyboard; pink at the nails, waxen in palm and fingers, long, narrow, flexible as rubber, were as unsuited to rolling pin and wringer, as her dainty waist and slender ankles were to walking or rocking a cradle. She was like Virginia girls, noble minded and indolent. Her nobility enabled her to scorn the second wife her father married; whom eleven half brothers and sis-Her mother expired with her ters called mother. own first breath. Perhaps that fatality furnished its own explanation; for a few months afterward her father took her away from doting grandparents who volunteered to rear her, and laid her in the arms of a woman he called wife, but could not persuade her to call mother. There was instinct in this aversion. It was fed by a multiplication of nursery companions who bore no likeness to her, did not cry in the same key, ate at other times and of different diet, and permitted her the exclusive privilege of relying upon "papa" while they wielded greater influence through the potential power of "mama". Vezia endured this step-mother-blight for nineteen years; during which she saw eleven children enrolled in the second volume of wedlock. She formed judgment, by the time she was grown, that her father achieved his ambition in this plentitude; that she was squeezed out of his affection by eleven times stronger pressure and the Amazonian mastery of the hot-headed, hard-hearted woman who took her mother's title, but was far from filling her mother's place.

The result was, Vezia left her father's house because it ceased to be home to her. The vulgarity of the step-mother, her coarseness, sensuality and persecution, became unbearable. When she grew old enough to comprehend what her own mother's qualities and characteristics probably were, she felt disgust at the array of eleven frowsy heads, knowing they meant insatiable passion; greed for personal, animal gratification; brutality which deprived her mother of life, her home of peace, her future of promise. She felt herself nothing but a wayfarer, a lingerer on hospitality. Her step-mother had no love for her. Eleven voracious sucklers drained the woman's bosom of motherhood. Her father acted as if she were a reminder of something twenty years

back he would like to forget; so she left home, went to Boston, into the heart of Yankee-land, seeking her living. From the outstart she was successful. Mr. Nourse possessed the means and had educated his first born lavishly, especially in music: and as soon as she presented her letters musical circles received her and employment crowded her. When she received the appointment of organist of Burr street chapel she met Armita Holbrook, a thorough Yankee girl, born and reared in the hills of New Hampshire. Armita was, like herself, self-dependent. They joined interests and made residence in the same house. Gradually the ambitions of these pure, upright and industrious girls blended until they grew into each other's life inseparably. Each brought to the intimacy her secrets, which were exchanged with sympathy. Vezia told Armita her family sorrow, and the latter confided the death of her parents, brothers and sisters from consumption, and her conviction she would ultimately become its victim. Such family skeletons naturally brought about discussion of matrimony. Vezia was disgusted with the thought. Her step-mother's prolixity degraded the relation in her eyes. Armita dreaded an alliance because shrouded by inherited disease. She would not transmit to others to suffer as she suffered from blight of ties. This unison of antipathy germinated into a bond of spinsterhood; which compact tended to adhese their friendship.

Vezia reflected over all these things as she turned into the Tremont street Mall of the Common, and sauntered along beneath her parasol. Her joy over Mr. Meserve's proposal was in no wise dimmed; only she wondered how she could convert Armita to approval? To break the news seemed harder than to answer the letter. It did not occur to her she had been acting double while receiving the minister's attentions; that she had been blinding Armita. She aroused to dilemma of confession, when confession was unavoidable. In ecstacy of affection she forgot her repugnance toward marital life. Brought to personal issue it became vague, something formerly believed, childish, foolish, to be deplored, forgotten. She was all smiles, hopes, plans, and grew restive to impart her happiness, striving to make herself believe Armita would applaud her and join in joy over the prospect of a life of happiness and religious zeal.

Two children passed her on the walk, one hideously crippled, though sufficiently resembling his companion to indicate relationship. The robust lad treated the invalid overbearingly. The puny child accepted it as a matter of course, wearing an air of inherited weakness. He looked as if he might be the last product of a child-weary mother. The nurse paid little heed to the cripple, bestowing mirth and smiles

upon the abler. Vezia imagined the nurse imitated the manner exhibited toward the children by their parents. The tiny one looked weak; as if he were a one-too-many, a negative wish, a desired absentee. He wore an unloved look, and an in-the-way bashfulness. He was what Armita predicted her offspring would be should she marry. He was also a reminder of the last of the Nourses. He made Vezia shudder and her heart throb; for he leered up under projecting brows as though expecting to be shoved aside. What made her so observant of the group? Why was she interested in children? They never attracted her; but she dwelt upon the gloomy predictions Armita had made, and wondered if she were doing right to venture into motherhood with deep seated horror of its entailments?

Vezia turned down West street, crossed Washington street, and into Bedford street, where the high school boys were enjoying recess. What sturdy, strong, hearty fellows! Parentage in their case had been a success. They were romping, shouting, scrambling over one another, pictures of health, buds of manhood, future husbands, future fathers, links in the chain of humanity. Vezia pictured herself the mother of such a boy. The thought made her feel more womanly; made her square her shoulders, and walk more erect; made her smile proudly as she stood by the iron fence watching them. The faint-

ness caused by the cripple's leer passed away. In its stead courage of possibility. Why might she not bear robust offspring? Why might her motherhood not prove a blessing? Why look on the dark side? Armita's fears needn't be hers? To her reasoning came the supreme logic of womanly consciousness, which is as naturally bent toward motherhood as trees to fruit. With a belief she was destined to become a mother, deliciously happy therein, she rang the bell of a comfortable residence and was admitted to one of her pupils.

"I saw you watching the high school boys, Miss Nourse. Aren't they handsome fellows?"

Vezia blushed; removing her gloves, and taking a seat opposite Mrs. Falling:

"I don't know that I remarked," disliking being watched, or having her inner thoughts invaded. "They seem very like all lads of their age."

"Oh, do you think so? To me they are a constant scource of entertainment. I watch them every day. Not because my son is among them, but because they are such manly, noble fellows, and represent the best blood of our city."

"You're a believer in blood, Mrs. Falling?"

"Most assuredly! Boston is founded-on its blood. These young men represent the best quality of our society. We have reason to be proud of them.

You Virginians are great believers in blood, Miss Nourse?"

"Oh, yes. We have some right noble-looking boys in the south," with a tinge of pride.

"Of course, my dear, of course; and some exquisitely dainty, sweet girls, also," with flattering turn of the head, which Vezia professed not to notice.

"That's your son's picture, I take it?" pointing to a painting of a dark-haired lad.

- "Yes, that's my boy."
- "Your only child?"

"Y-e-s," replied Mrs. Falling, looking curiously at her caller, "and I'm most happy in possessing him because he is a picture of his dead father, whom I gave to his country. Until my husband's death he was the one regret of my married life. You look surprised? Ah, my dear Miss Nourse, you don't know. We women of society cannot be successful mothers. The drawing room, boudoir, and reception room are not mother-makers. Toilers on the farm and help-meets of hard-working men take kindly to child-bearing; but never ladies of luxury. It takes calloused natures to bear pain, and calloused hearts to inflict it. Only selfish men become fathers; only slaveish women, mothers. Look at your hands, my dear! You'll know one of these days."

Little did Mrs. Falling, with vanity which cultivates music at maturity, realize the effect of her

words. They seemed to prove to this child of the first Mrs. Nourse how removed she was from the quality of the second Mrs. Nourse; and how completely the latter filled her father's ideal. She glanced down at her beautiful hands and thought;

"They were mother's hands; not his."

She would have said more on the subject (for it interested her) but Mrs. Falling placed her portly figure on the piano stool and the tedious lesson began.

When she emerged, Vezia felt too much perturbed to give the bothersome Cutter children their lesson. They had clumsy, thick, flat fingers, and talked a great deal. She wended her way homeward, revolving what Mrs. Falling said and comparing the hearty high school boys with the puny cripple she saw earlier in the day. This matter of children and parentage became of serious moment when assured she was to have a husband. Malignity of matrimony seemed to Vezia inevitable offspring. Her dread, pathetic fear, and hesitation of girlhood stood affrighted before the question: "Will I be a mother?" Eleven strange faces in the new crop of Nourses crowded her mind. They wrapped themselves in the lineage of her family, leaving nothing for her. Either she had blood to beget noble sturdy children like the high school boys, or they had it all and derived it from their imported mother. The discussion of blood by Mrs. Falling was ill-timed. It caused Vezia conflict of feeling; unwomaned her; gave acid taint to her heart; made her walk nervously up the Park street Mall toward Beacon street. At the corner she passed a gentleman followed by an immense dog. Both man and dog bespoke blood and breeding. The man by his bearing, would own no dog but a thoroughbred. Had he children? She looked after him. If so, they must be thoroughbred. She grew confused, bewildered. She pressed her hand to her forehead. It was feverish, throbbing. She was doubting the quality of her blood, and conjecturing if Mr. Meserve was of high birth. This struck her as being particularly silly. She lowered her parasol, crossed to the shady side and hurried home.

She was surprised to find Armita lying on the outside of the bed, crying.

"Why, 'Mita, dear!' throwing down her parasol and sitting on the side of the bed to draw her gloves. "What's the matter?"

Armita's attitude was abandoned. Her skirts were drawn up, exposing slender ankles and limbs; the tiny feet encased in low ties; her face buried on her arm; in the sighing stage of grief. Vezia lay down beside her, gathered her in her arms, whereat Armita burst into fresh tears.

"What is it, 'Mita? What's happened? Are you ill?"

Armita shook her head and kept on sobbing. Vezia became alarmed. She turned her over, drew her face against her bosom, stroked her brow and kissed her wet eyes.

"But you must tell me, 'Mita! What's the matter? You alarm me! What can I do for you?"

The weeping girl flung her arms about Vezia's neck and sobbed:

"Oh—I—have—deceived—you—Vezia! I've—been—untrue to—you! I'm so—sorry! I did'nt mean—to—darling,—I'm sure I didn't!"

"Why, what is it? What do you mean, 'Mita? Deceived me! How can that be?"

"Oh—it—was—cruel—in—me, Vezia—dear! I—oughtn't—to be so—mean! But—I couldn't—tell you, truly—I—couldn't!"

"Couldn't tell me? Couldn't tell me what, 'Mita! Come, dear, no matter what it is, tell Vezia all about it?"

"Well—oh, I can't—but—you'll forgive me, won't—you, dear?"

"Yes, yes! What is it? Tell me quick!"

"I'm-I'm-going-to-be-married!"

Vezia dropped her as if she had been molton iron; sprang off the bed and stood in the middle of the room looking at her with amazement and amusement. Then she flung herself down once more, gathered Armita to her heart as if to smother

her, and burst into a scream of laughter which made the robin shiver and cock his little head with fright and wonder. Armita's tears stopped instantly. She raised herself, stared at Vezia, who rolled and gasped with hysterical outburst seemingly interminable.

"Why, Vezia! What do you mean? Have you lost your senses?"

Vezia continued her laugh until the robin chirped and danced about, and Armita could not restrain a sickly sort of a smile. At length when the paroxysm had subsided, she arose, and sitting on the side of the bed put one arm about Armita and drew forth the sacred letter and laid it in her friend's hand. Then, while Armita read, Vezia hid her face in the pillow. Armita went through the letter twice, the smile on her face increasing as she realized how they both stood in dread of confession now made with blended tears and smiles.

"Come, dear," exclaimed Armita, rising and arranging her skirts, "let's sit down and talk this over rationally. We both seem to have been traitors?"

"Yes; but you've been so the longest!"

"I don't know about that. You and Mr. Meserve must have had an understanding quite a while."

"And you and-"

"Ah!" with a merry laugh, "You don't know who to accuse, do you, dear?"

"No. Tell me, 'Mita? Who is it?"

"Mr. Chandler."

"Oh, 'Mita, won't you be happy?"

A shadow crossed Armita's face as she sank into the rocker by the table.

"I hope so, Vezia, I hope so, but-"

"There, there, darling?" and Vezia sank upon the floor beside the doubting girl and put both arms about her, "you're just too full of those horrid 'buts.' You must stop those right away, love. You're going to marry a handsome, rich, splendid gentleman; and you ought to be as happy as a queen! Why aren't you, 'Mita?"

Armita hung her head. Her narrow shoulders lifted with emotion as the hectic flush came to her cheeks, followed by slight coughing.

"I almost feel as if Mr. Chandler were marrying me as a mercy." Armita lay her thin hand on her bosom to allay the cough. "As if he were seeking to prolong my life for a little by taking me away from the desk. I feel he has pity for me, but I love him with all my heart! Oh, that I had the constitution to make him the wife he deserves!"

"Now, now, 'Mita, you're going off on that hackneyed old subject again! You mustn't get so depressed. Your health's as good as it was two years ago?" "No, it's not, Vezia. You don't know. I don't make any complaints, but I feel very badly at times; and I can't feel I'm doing right to give myself to this man, weak and helpless as I am."

Vezia seeing Armita's unaffected concern, laid her face against the hot cheek, striving to cheer her.

"You'll go away on a tour, 'Mita, and have a whole year abroad and come home so much improved you won't know yourself!" Smiling sweetly into the flushed, woe-begone face.

They laughed again as their secrecy and it's peculiar discovery recurred. They hugged and kissed each other, and Armita shed a few more tears of nervousness. Vezia arose and took a chair opposite.

"Well, I must write an answer to this dear minister's proposal. Can't you dictate it, 'Mita?"

"You're not going to answer it today?"

"Oh, no! What am I thinking of! That would be wretched bad taste, wouldn't it? He'd think I was waiting for it, wouldn't he?"

Perhaps you - "

"Now, now!" placing her graceful hand over Armita's lips. "You've no right to say that, dear."

The glimpse Vezia had of her faultless hand lying over Armita's lips caused her to view it carefully as she dropped it into her lap.

"'Mita, we ought to be very sure we're doing just right."

"What do you mean, Vezia?'

Still examining her hands:

- "We ought to be sure we're making proper alliances."
 - "I don't understand you?"
- "What I mean is this, 'Mita. We are to become wives, hence, we have every reason to believe we'll become mothers."

"Aren't you a trifle precipitate, my dear?"

Vezia blushed. Mrs. Falling's ideas were in her mind. She had not forgotten the man with the dog.

"No, I think not. It would be more precipitate to contract a marriage without reflection. I claim blue blood in my veins, 'Mita."

Armita smiled, even at the seriousness of her friend's face.

- "What do you mean by blue blood, Vezia?"
- "Oh, I mean I can trace my ancestry, and it's distinguished. Our's has always been one of the first families of Virginia."
- "And you fear you may be making a bad alliance regarding families?"
 - "I know nothing of Mr. Meserve's antecedents?"
 - "You love him, though, don't you?"
 - "Indeed, I do!"
 - "Don't you think you can trust your heart?"
 - "What does my heart know more than my head?"

"Your head has told you not to marry, Vezia. Hasn't it?"

"Y-e-s."

"Well, now your heart tells you the contrary. The heart's strongest. Always so in a woman. I don't know anything about Mr. Chandler's family. He may have been born in poverty, obscurity, degradation. I don't propose taking any steps to find out. He loves me. That I know. He knows I'm the last of my family; but he wants me. My heart has told me I must put myself in his hands. It's God's will. All the happiness I'll have in life must come through him. My heart tells me his blood is as blue as mine. I've no fear to mingle them."

Vezia still gazed at her beautiful hands; still thought of what Mrs. Falling said; still of the man with the dog.

"But 'Mita, if you should have - "

She checked herself; but not soon enough. Armita leaned forward, putting her hand on Vezia's knee.

"Our old time bugbear, dear. How often have we discussed it? I've not forgotten it, nor excluded it from my decision. I know I'll become a mother. I feel it. I've a presentiment. I come of a fruitful race. My parents had ten children; buds frostbitten by death; many of them cut down in the slumber of infancy. I used to dread the thought. You know how much I've feared it? Already

disease is doing it's work in me. I feel I'm doomed, as sure as the sun shines yonder. I've made no secret of this to Mr. Chandler. I'm a consumptive. I've told him all about it. I'll bring to my nuptials a blight; but I'll be his wife, and a mother, if it be God's will!"

Vezia felt peculiarly over these utterances. She seemed possessed of determination almost vicious in it's willfulness. Armita divined her thoughts.

"You think me foolish, Vezia, to be so set in this, to so completely retrace my steps, to take such an opposite view from what I've always preached?"

Vezia wanted to say she thought it remarkable, but remembered some of her own utterances.

"No, 'Mita, I don't think you acted more strangely than I."

"But from a different motive?"

Vezia looked at her. She felt what Armita was about to say and it made her uneasy.

"I've known you intimately for two years. Vezia, and I've learned that you were born to be a wife. All your suberb vitality and intensity of nature were not given you to be blown like desert sand on winds of unmet desire. To you, dear, marriage is a necessity. You are intended for a mother. Your blood is burning blood; thick, plenteous; it gushes through your veins and thrills and trembles. It gen-

erates love as coals make steam. It surcharges you, animates you, enlivens you, stimulates you, makes your whole being wifely. You must marry, Vezia! I've known this, and sometimes feared for you."

She spoke with such feeling and truth, Vezia could not withdraw her eyes from the sunken pallid face with its two rose spots, the dark rings under the lids, the fragile wrists and needle-like fingers. Armita was all a-quiver with nervous energy which consumed the weakened body. A short pause and she continued:

"With me, Vezia dear, it is different. I don't marry because I crave anything but rest, care, tenderness. I'm tired of being tossed about on the raft of labor. You may think me selfish, Vezia, and unworthy such generous love as Mr. Chandler's; but I've told him all. I don't covet his wealth, for I'll not live to enjoy it. But I do long for his strong arms about me; for his strong tones to comfort; for his strong kisses to revive; for his strong courage to help me be the wife he craves, so long as my strength lasts. And if, before the sands are run, I am able to leave him my face and heart and love in a tiny counterpart, then I'll be ready to go, and I shall go. Yes, then I will go, Vezia."

Tears came into her eyes as she tried to look Vezia in the face, a brave, steady, unquestioning look. She clasped the vigorous girl's hands in hers and fanned her face with hot breath, exhaled through thin, blue, pursed lips.

Vezia knew all Armita said of her was true. The infallible sensibilities of nature acquiesced with what she saw was no mystery to this woman who had been her constant companion. The predictions Armita made for herself she wanted to think exaggerated; but there were too much steadiness and firmness in the voice, too certain reality in the gaze, too much assurance in the judgment. Vezia experienced release from secrecy. There was no longer anything untold between them. Armita knew her better than she knew herself. The predictions she made, and the deep, fathoming analysis of her frail, doomed self occasioned sorrowful reflections in Vezia's mind. She saw blue blood in this girl of a different type. It was blue blood of courage, which saw death at every corner yet feared it not. Armita knew, as those know who hear the swish of Death's scythe ever ringing in their ears; who look behind and see His trail of despoilation; who see loved ones strewing the wake of life. She had been honest with her affianced, and pictured to him-ah! if she pictured to him as graphically as she pictured to Vezia, what love he had for her! She was ready to go to the altar as she was prepared to go to the grave. One must soon follow the other. To be a loving, grateful wife first; perhaps a suffering, sacrificing mother; to leave in his arms an image of herself; then to the grave to draw over her head the pall of mortal oblivion; to be perhaps forgotten by husband and child; and to do all this for destiny, for fate. Ready to render happiness to him for a time; and then, tired, worn out, consumed, exhausted, evaporating as the mist lifts and its mosaics of filmy charm fall into chaos of rugged outline, to float away into the ether of the Forever!

Vezia thought this sublime in Armita.

It was.

Armita's arms rested on the table, her face laid upon them. Vezia sat directly opposite the mirror and studied the arch of her own regal head, the classic contour of her features, the suberb mould of her figure. Was hers blue blood? Was it blue blood made those perfect lines and that daintiness? The blue of the heavens is blue because of depth and substance. Was her character deep and substantial? No head wears the laurel if the form wear not the purple. Men crown men, but God makes kings. A prick of the wrist of Armita or herself the oozing drops would have the same hue; but one would made her faint, the other kill Armita. Vezia felt her superficiality, Armita's sincerity. Her solidity was lustreless; Armita's hollow life brilliant. The genuine must melt away in the grave. The counterfeit was to shine in social splender. She thought

again of the high school boys, the cripple, and the man with the dog. Of them all none seemed blue blooded but the little atom of humpbacked anatomy who leered from under his pain-wrinkled brows, avoiding a blow and shirking a curse.

Glancing into her lap Vezia saw the letter of proposal. Her heart—the heart Armita bade her heed—made reply with pumping blood; wrote answer with crimsoning face and throbbing pulse. The eleven legatees of her ancestral estate were forgotten; the passionate fecundity of her usurpuous stepmother was forgotten; all she thought of was her own sweet, self, lapsing into calm selfishness which a woman's heart casts about her when the dear wish of her being is a tangible possibility.

The lunch bell rang. Armita excused herself on the plea of fatigue and remained in the chamber.

When Vezia had gone down stairs Armita arose, went to the mirror and closely examined her wan, drawn appearance. She smoothed back her thick, brown hair, bathed her swollen eyes, fondled her slenderness in a self-pitying way, amazed she could be the object of a man's adoration. Then she crossed to the mantel and leaned wearily before the pictures of her parents, inwardly reproving them for begetting her. She was capable of happiness and dearly longed for it. Her soul had natural lightness of air, but it was confined, sealed in the opaque glass of

hopelessness. A man's love and his wealth-commanding power, at her call! All to live for! Death doubly deplorable! Eagerness charging her watery blood! Anticipation thumping at her incapable heart! Vengeance of clamoring happiness asking release from bondage of fate! She shook her head, gazing at those who brought her into being to be* driven from its greenest pastures by disease. father and mother seemed transparent, hazy outlines of existence, coming and going in their frames like respirations of memory. They had shape but no substance. She thought of the family legends of the rigor of the Cape Cod winters, when her ancestors braved exposure, hunger, conflict with savages, to bequeath her-what? A name strong as the rock ribs of the coast; but a vitality perishable as ice upon the hearth. Hers was the blue blood of Miles Standish and John Alden, paled, thinned, wasted away. Only enough of it left to trace her life upon dried and brittle parchment. She turned away heart-sick and sank into her chair.

Armita's pathetic attitude caused Vezia, when she returned, to sit on the arm of the chair and caress her.

[&]quot;When are you to be married, 'Mita?"

[&]quot;I've left the office to prepare for the wedding. Whenever I'm ready."

[&]quot;You'll live in town?"

"On Boylston street. Mr. Chandler has purchased a home there. He's also building a summer place at Chelmsford."

"You'll go abroad, won't you, dear?"

"That rests with me. He leaves our tour to my choice. I suppose you'll hardly be able to go to Europe? Mr. Meserve cannot well be spared from his church."

"No, I suppose not," replied Vezia with a pang of envy at her friend's superior luck. "All that deters me from accepting Mr. Meserve are the restrictions and confinements of his profession; for I very much doubt if I'm qualified to be a minister's wife."

Armita looked at her friend.

"Why, you've not a doubt about becoming his wife, Vezia?"

Vezia was silent. Of a sudden her impulsive nature resented restraints of pastoral life, and the impecuniosity of the clergyman compared with the affluence of Mr. Chandler made her momentarily spiteful and envious. Why weren't their positions reversed? But she dismissed that thought bravely.

"No, of course not. I shall accept him and will be happy, and will make him the best wife I know how."

"That's beautifully said," exclaimed Armita. "I'm so glad to hear you say so, dear, because with that

view you'll be so much happier. You're marrying a grand man! I wonder if you value him?"

This was said absently, not doubtingly. Armita appreciated the qualities of the clergyman, and hoped Vezia realized them all.

"He's a remarkable man in many ways," continued Armita. "He's worthy the best there is in your rare womanhood. Remember that the best in a husband is the work of the best in his wife. Because he's a minister he is none the less human. Don't you stand the least little bit in awe of him, Vezia?"

"I'm afraid it will be hard for me to conform to so prosy a life. If he weren't a clergyman, but a rich man—"

"Oh, Vezia, you're envious! You must remember if he weren't a clergyman he wouldn't be Mr. Meserve! That's one of women's mistakes. It's too much the fashion to marry men for what they have; not for what they are. Our parents didn't marry thus."

This reference to her parents revived in Vezia memories of the despoiled home down in Albemarle; brought up the numerical eleven; recalled what Mrs. Falling said; all of which made her toss her head; and Armita felt sure she was envious.

"If we women," continued Armita, "would only cultivate our husbands instead of cultivating their

possessions, we'd be vastly happier. I've been as reluctant giving my consent to Mr. Chandler because of his wealth as on account of my health. You'll think this strange, dear, but I care nothing for his money. Yet men of wealth know their power. Be they ever so good and kind, and though they love a woman ever so much, there's a certain vanity a rich man always has. And this is largely because women are not sufficiently sincere to separate the man from his possessions. But, thank God, "I can do so, for what are riches to me? What is anything to one who cannot enjoy? Mr. Chandler's money cannot give me back health, cannot increase my happiness, cannot soften the agonies of death."

Armita hid her face in her hands a moment.

"But I mustn't talk this way, must I, dear? That doesn't affect your case. Only don't covet money, Vezia, nor imagine it brings anything helpful to love or assisting to matrimony. I'm in a position to know; you're not. Both these men have the ambitions of all husbands. Men are alike in that regard. I can read the ulterior desire in Mr. Chandler's eyes. He is identical with the humblest, poorest man in the world in longing to be a father; but his wealth is powerless to that end, as it is in many other matters. A wife outranks a fortune in the procurement of a husband's ambition. Look at it in that light, Vezia. See what occupies Mr.

Meserve as the paramount desire of his life; and address yourself to its attainment, with all the energy you possess, and you'll be a happy wife. The desire of the husband is the wish of the father. It is so universally, dear. And we women should acquire such an insight into our husbands' natures as will enable us to promote whatever their manly inclinations foster."

"You talk like a philosopher, 'Mita. What prodigious reasoning your practical little head contains? And how averse you used to be to the possibility of marrying?"

Armita clasped her knee with her palms and leaned forward thoughtfully, gazing through the open window.

"I'm not altogether converted yet, dear," she replied. "You start, and think it very queer? I've said enough of myself to indicate wherein my doubts lie. But for you I have the heartiest approval. You will be supremely happy unless you make yourself unhappy."

"You don't think I'll do that?"

"I hope not. But it's being done daily. I sometimes think married women have more temptations than single ones."

"I can't see how?"

"We've never been married, Vezia, so we cannot fully understand. But I can imagine so much that's in the way of a wife's being all she should, as well as in her being careful not to be what she ought not."

"Wives are only women, 'Mita."

"That's it. And the older I grow, and the shorter my life becomes, it seems as if I had clearer insight into some things. I feel as if I had it in me to be an apostolic wife, if that expresses it. I feel that the fears, doubts, jealousies, which encompass marriage are to be spared me. I feel I'll be brave in everything; and knowing the inevitable, I've schooled myself not to dread any result however fatal. I don't want to make you gloomy, dear, but I want to make myself plain. We adore the men whose love is our's. We trust them. We believe implicitly in them. We could believe nothing ill of them. But their loves are untried by us. After they have been tried, when we know them better, we'll discover they are not everything we believed them. The purest gold dulls. We have hard work not to toss it aside. Our temptation is to believe it no longer gold. But it is still gold, Vezia, if for no other reason because our womanly honor, virtue, faith, trust have made it gold. Though husbands prove inconstant, wives' honor can never be forfeited except by their own will. The altar a wife sets up in the temple of wedlock remains an altar. It can never be anything else. Altars may be devastated, despoiled, wrecked;

but they are still altars. A wife can protect that altar by remaining by it; keeping it's tapers replenished, it's incense burning, it's soft, sweet music murmuring the undying vespers of constancy. Never allow anything to tempt you to turn your back upon that altar, Vezia. Within it's holy of holies is the sanctuary of motherhood, which no true woman ever deserts. When within woman God lights the lamp of another life, a halo appears above the altar of wifehood as it appeared above the manger in Bethlehem. To every loyal wife conception is the work of immaculate love. If men have Christ for an example, women have His mother. Either love-sanctified conception by an obedient wife is immaculate, or the future is a delusive dream. Forgive me, Vezia, but this has grown very close to my heart. I've dwelt upon it for years. And when I realize that the last task of my life is to embody the virtues of wife and perhaps the pains of of maternity, I feel more than ever the responsibility of carrying out that task to the best of my capacity. Marriage may, or may not, be sinless. If sinless, what we term heredity will reward victory over sin, and our off-spring will be pure, right-minded, noble. But if it be sinful, as sure as fate spins it's thread, the visitation will come in some form or other. Nature is God's expression, and God never masks His face. If we please Him our children will

be bright, happy, perfect; but if we displease Him, they will be blighted, misshapen, hideous, in body or mind."

As Armita dilated upon these truths Vezia recalled the cripple. His crouched, shapeless back, his hunted, leering eyes, came to her mind and she wondered what displeasure his parents had occasioned? With all her native sense and accomplishing education, Vezia listened attentively to the expounding of these prophetic truths. The glossings of culture had not directed her thoughts into the channels of self-examination, nor into enquiries calculated to unravel what ceased to be mysterious to Armita's intelligence. Armita proved herself deeply learned in the classics of rational being. To what was she indebted for this? To the inspiration which fortifies, the disclosure which comes, the explanation which precedes. These were imparted to her by the Benignity which clothes some minds. Her powers of insight enabled her to divest convictions by Providence of their marvel, and prompted her to awaken in Vezia a livelier sense of the responsibilities she was about to undertake. Vezia looked into Armita's face. Something etherial, seraphic glowed in the transparent skin, in the unfathomable eyes that peered out into the vanishing day. As her lips ceased moving Armita appeared possessed by preoccupation of what she

had been saying. She seemed oblivious to everything about. Her face was flushed in spots; her rich, dark hair fell abundantly over her brow; her pinched and sallow features seemed smoother, softer, more brilliant; her slender form leaned forward in transfixed unconsciousness; she looked poetic; the mortal encasement of a wondrous soul, the frail shell of a marvelous spirit.

Vezia could scarcely believe her a prospective wife, for it meant so much to Armita it didn't to herself; but she knew the soul of the girl was in all she said and she reverenced her expressions. It was hard for Vezia with her human vitality to comprehend the spirituality of this woman who felt the ebb of her life set in. She felt Armita was morbid; she was unable to grasp the import of what rose above the sphere of human womanhood and absorbed the philosophy of innate being. The focus of Vezia's soul was narrow, more shallow than Armita's, and her nature was less expansive and capacious.

The robin went to his perch, while these women sat in the twilight occupied with their thoughts. The night settled roundabout. It had been a remarkable day, the most singular in their lives. When the stars came out, their wakeful eyes saw the skies reflecting the brightness of the great city's night. What were their reflections while sleep was

tying up the ravelled sleeve? Vezia exchanged dreams of day for those of sweet and slumberous night; and Armita sank into insensible joy which wraps the faintest heart with courage and makes light the weariest feet.



PART TWO.

THE PARCEL.

Rev. Hollis Meserve stood in his doorway, saw his visitor pass down the steps to the street, waved his hand courteously, returned into the hallway. Possibly the subdued light of the Moorish lamp upon the stairpost depressed him? There is something ghoulish about the black, lobster-cage hangings with double thickness of glass and a discouraged flicker behind. The mahogany wainscoting and doors, the walnut stairs and dark, stripped flooring may have been too sombre for a man in his frame of mind? The dark rugs and unlighted drawing room, tomb-like through parted portieres, may have helped his lonely feeling? He made little noise in his moccasins as he ascended to his study. A quiet man by nature, he would not be otherwise because alone; and with sad, serious contemplations his movements were more quiet than usual. He dropped into an easy chair, laid his head back, put the tips of his fingers together, for meditation.

Ralph Chandler had just left. He stepped in on his way home to announce the grave illness of his wife. Strange hallucination! Forewarned as he had been, he spoke of her decline surprisedly. He seemed shocked; dazed by the culmination overshadowing. He attributed her collapse to recent accouchement. He described her weakness as helpless; her temperature as fluctuating; her vitality as diminishing. He quoted extensively from technicalities of physicians; referred to the improvement in her health since marriage; and dwelt especially upon the cessation of her cough. But she was losing ground daily.

Would her pastor visit her?

Mr. Meserve told Mr. Chandler his wife was spending the afternoon with Mrs. Chandler. Certainly he would pay a visit the following day, and if he or Mrs. Meserve could be of service they held themselves in readiness.

These courtesies exchanged, Mr. Chandler hurriedly departed, and Mr. Meserve returned to his study to resume preparation of a discourse. Before taking up the thread of theology he fell into contemplation of antecedent and existing conditions.

He had been particularly happy in the friendship of Ralph Chandler and his wife. They pursued such beautiful lives of marital devotedness, elegant simplicity, faultless charity, humble piety. The rare influence of the wife shone in the husband's

life. She lifted him into higher, nobler paths of thought and action. Not that Mr. Chandler had been excessive in worldliness. He enjoyed a rich man's pleasures; which, when he married Armita Holbrook, she induced him to abandon. The result was that a few months after their marriage the pastor rejoiced to welcome the millionaire into the church, and henceforth the home life of the Chandlers was filled with Christian blessings. More particularly was Mr. Meserve pleased because Mr. Chandler was prompted to make noble use of his wealth, so unlike the employment of fortunes in the hands of most men of affairs. He disposed of his fast horses and with the money built additions to his mills, thereby giving employment to hundreds. He severed his club connections and gave the annual fees for the education of several talented, struggling young people. He established a public library in his native town and built there a church. He gave large sums to members of his own family whose life struggle had been less successful. In numerous ways this great business power yielded to the graciousness of his wife, to whom much credit was due for his munificence and kind-heartedness. Such was the power of the woman to be taken away.

Very confidential she had been with her pastor when abandoning the foreign trip her husband proposed, preferring to address herself to homechandler a help and delight in his professional work, and when he learned of her motherhood he rejoiced for father and offspring, because he comprehended what bounty of affection and sacrifice it meant. Mr. Meserve knew, as he felt Mr. Chandler must know, the days of this woman's life were numbered. She had told her pastor how much she was anxious to accomplish in the brief time to be hers. The only way he could account for her husband's blindness to approaching fatality was the hopeful wilfulness people encourage when they know the inevitable, but make themselves believe its remoteness.

Mr. Meserve had rejoiced in the intimacy of Mrs. Chandler and his wife. Their fondness for each other increased, and the mild influence of the invalid softened Mrs. Meserve's impetuous nature. The prospective demise of Mrs. Chandler came very near the pastor's household, for their ties were of the truest character.

While employed in these reflections he heard a ring at the front door. Remembering the servant was out, and thinking of his wife's return he descended and opened the door. A boy stood in the stoop, a small parcel in his hand.

[&]quot;Does Mrs. Meserve live here?"

[&]quot;She does."

The boy thrust the package into his hand and randown the steps.

This incident scarcely interrupted the current of his thought. He returned to his study bearing the package. He turned it over. It was without address, a small parcel, in white paper, tied with red string such as pharmacists use. Why no name, nor address? Doubtless something his wife had purchased and ordered sent home. Mr. Meserve was not curious, but found himself untieing the package. Some mistake. The boy had left the wrong one. He carefully replaced the wrapper and cord, and laid it on his desk, to have handy when the boy returned.

Among his reflections the pastor recalled the happiness of his choice of Vezia. At the time of their marriage Armita had said many kindly things regarding her friend, leading Mr. Meserve to believe he had secured a jewel. Reality proved she had not done Vezia justice. The quick, impulsive girl possessed endearing attributes which belong to excitable natures. Her assistance in church matters; her concern for the poor; her zeal in hospital work; her delight in the Sabbath school; made his life unspeakably happy and profitable. He could not help feeling that he, minus the Chandlers' money, was most blessed; for no skeleton overshadowed his household. His wife was strong,

hearty, ambitious, devoted to him, untiring in the church, amiable, happy, contented. These intensified Mr. Meserve's sympathy for Mr. Chandler and made him prayerfully thankful in his own behalf.

The bell rang again. This time it was his wife.

"Ah, dear," kissing him fondly, "you were on the lookout for me?"

"Yes, dear, I've been waiting for you."

"I've been with 'Mita, Hollis. She's going fast. It's but a matter of a little while. I staid there until Mr. Chandler came home."

"He called here on his way. Isn't it strange he can't see she's doomed?"

"Y-e-s," drawled Vezia, glancing about to the hat tree and table.

They ascended the stairs and entered the study. She laid off her wrap and bonnet and drew a chair to the hearth. He leaned upon the mantel."

"I can't account for Chandler's blindness," he went on. "He speaks as if she is sure to recover."

"Why, Hollis, she's so weak she can't lift a hand. To be sure her cough's disappeared and she's full of excitement over the baby. Splendid little fellow he is, Hollis, and you're so fond of babies, aren't you, dear? You must go and see him."

"I promised Mr. Chandler to call upon his wife tomorrow. He said she expressed a desire to see me. Did she say anything to you about it?" Vezia caught sight of the parcel on the desk. She flushed, stared, and heard nothing he said.

- "Did she say anything about it to you?"
- "About what, dear?" rousing and looking at him curiously.
 - "About my coming to have a talk with her?"
 - ." I don't recall that she did."
- "Perhaps it's simply his wish; but he led me to think she desired it."

"Very likely, dear. She's fully aware her end is near. Oh, Hollis, isn't it too bad? Think of it! What if I were in her place? Mercy! Its awful!"

She shivered, drew more closely to the fire, looked furtively at the parcel, and was ill at ease. Her husband noticed it.

"I'm afraid your call unnerved you, darling?" he said, stroking her hair. "Yet your nerves are, ordinarily, excellent. You stayed too long, and the conversation was not calculated to brighten you?"

"No, indeed," she replied, wearily, gazing into the fire. "We talked of nothing but her illness, her confinement, her wasting strength, and her approaching death. I don't think it right for a woman in 'Mita's condition to have children. It's a sin—a shame!"

"It's Divinely ordained, Vezia. It has to be. We can't array ourselves against the ordinations of Providence, nor take God's law out of His hands."

He spoke as though he had expressed those convictions before; and she listened as if again disagreeing with them. She shrugged her shoulders and cast another look at the parcel.

"But it seems so injudicious," she went on, occupied by the package and peculiar expressions flitting over her face, "and so ill-advised to bring children into the world to leave them orphans."

This remark was too commonplace to attract him. He was poking the heavy coal in the grate to enliven it's blaze. He leaned over in front of her. She fixed a peculiar look on him. It wasn't a wholesome, nor a natural look to her, nor one she would have him see. It was a look one fixes on another when there is treachery in the heart. Yet, accuse her of that?

He turned. The look vanished.

"A boy left a parcel for you, dear. On the desk there. It must be a mistake. Ah, there's the bell. Probably it's the boy to rectify his blunder. I'll take it to him."

He picked up the little parcel. She arose nervously, but he paid no heed, and passed out into the hall. She pressed her hands together and watched him disappear. She bit her lip, paled and flushed, flung herself into a chair, tapped her foot nervously, twisted her dainty fingers, moved about in her seat, then arose and paced the room. She went to the door, opened it softly, listened. He was giving some directions to the servant about supper. She it was who rang. Vezia closed the door, walked the floor, her hands clasped behind. Hearing him ascending the stairs she resumed her seat and calm demeanor. He returned with the package and laid it on the desk. Her eyes followed it eagerly. Her expression alarmed him.

"You've overdone yourself, Vezia. Hadn't you better go to your room and let Maggie bring you up a cup of tea while you rest a little? I'll be out to church meeting tonight, you know."

"Perhaps I had, but you needn't have anything sent me. A nap is all I need."

He kissed her fondly.

"You'll not be late, dear?"

"Not late, I hope."

He kissed her again. She slowly left the room.

In her chamber Vezia flung herself on the bed and covered her face. Listening to Armita's woeful predictions, witnessing that waste of disease, experiencing pity for a blighted home, were too much for her. But the chief disturbance arose from another cause, which exit from the study did not diminish. She stopped thinking of Armita and thought of herself. She was deceiving her husband and it worried her. It was easier for her to be diplomatic since her deception of Armita over the be-

trothal. That was the first deceit of her life. It was not momentous, but it initiated her. Wife though she was, she lived much within herself. She was secretive and independent. Her respect for her husband, her reliance on his judgment, never led her to put him before her own reasoning. She thought she could act for herself better than any one could for her. That was her logic when she deceived Armita. As wife she felt as independent as maiden. She found her husband deficient in what a wife seeks counsel upon. This encouraged her self-reliance; increased her secretiveness. She had taken the secrets of wedlock into her charge, and they were preying upon her. She was troubled, disturbed, in dilemma. She was further than ever from the confidence a broad spirit and a deeper intelligence would have prompted; and was glad to commune with her distraction, incapable of rearranging her mind.

Vezia heard the tea bell ring, heard her husband close the study door on his way to the dining room. She arose, tip-toed into the hall and down stairs into the study. The parcel lay upon the desk. She seized it and hurried back to her chamber. She placed it carefully away; proving that the boy in a hurry made no mistake. With brighter countenance and easier mind she disrobed and retired.

Some hours later she was awakened by her husband entering the room.

"Vezia, the boy came for the parcel on my desk, didn't he? I see it's gone."

She feigned drowsiness, and murmured in a half-awake fashion:

- "Oh-y-e-s-d-e-a-r."
- "I thought so. Do you feel better?"
- "Y-e-s-d-e-a-r."
- "I was kept later than I expected."

He kissed her good night, put out the gas, and went back to his study.



BETRAYING A SECRET.

Rev. Mr. Meserve wended his way down Boylston street, ascended the broad marble steps of Mr. Chandler's residence, and was admitted. He was ushered into a luxurious drawing room, mellowed by soft laces and toned tapestries; not over furnished, but expressing comfort and elegance. The touch of woman's refinement was everywhere, but it was not a vain touch. There was pride but no elaborateness; dignity without rigidity; richness but no exaggeration. As he sat in the open bay window, awaiting summons to the sick room, he could not restrain comparison between the taste here and that shown in his home adornments. It was not distinction of means. He was not unreasonable. Expenditure was not the item, for his residence was furnished by the society, his wife being called upon to merely make selections. He had never observed the dissimilarity in these women until sitting in this room. Mrs. Chandler's taste was quiet, sober, genuine. Vezia's leaned to brilliancy, show, the artificial. Not being critical perhaps accounted for his oversight. There

seemed something here not in his own home. It annoyed him.

The nurse invited the pastor to Mrs. Chandler's room.

As he went up the stairs he heard the wee voice of an infant. It sent a peculiar thrill through his heart; a hungry, longing sensation.

He was shown into the large front room partly darkened. Upon a couch reclined Mrs. Chandler, clad in a morning robe which pronounced her emaciation. The rose hangings lessened her pallor.

"You are very good to come to see me," she whispered, trying to rise and extend her hand. "Be seated please. You may leave us, nurse."

He took a low chair beside her. She retained clasp of his hand.

"Aren't you afraid to have so much company? Vezia tells me she spent yerterday afternoon with you."

"Oh, no. I enjoy seeing you, my dear friend; and Vezia is my stay and prop," she replied with difficulty. "Ralph told me last night you said you would call today. You don't know how pleased I was." She looked up and smiled. "Would you kindly raise me a little?"

He lifted her tenderly.

"Thank you."

She spoke more easily, and continued:

"I wanted to see you because I've a few things to talk to you about. The end isn't far off, and God forgive me, but for my little son I don't care how soon it comes. You wouldn't blame me if you knew how I suffer."

"I don't blame you. I know how ill you've been and I understand there's a limit to human endurance. Moreover, you are prepared?"

"Yes," she replied, a light crossing her wan face, "I am prepared, fully. I have done all I had to do to the best of my capacity. I've nothing to regret, nothing I would have otherwise. I don't dread leaving Mr. Chandler. You seem surprised?"

He gave her a hurried glance.

"You must know there is a point where invalids do well to sever the dearest ties. Love doesn't improve within sight of the grave. It would be unreasonable to expect to drag healthy, vigorous men into the tomb to inspire their devotion."

She paused a moment, then resumed:

"Ralph's love for me hasn't wavered yet. It is as steadfast as ever. Baby's birth intensified it. But if I linger long it will subside and grow fatigued."

Again she paused. He would have spoken, but she resumed:

"That seems hard for a loving husband like yourself to believe? You feel no matter how great a care Vezia might become you'd still be devoted to her? But you wouldn't; 'tisn't human."

Another pause, and she went on:

"Nature never breaks her ties too soon where disease is at work. Slow dying life may linger until extinction will not provoke a tear; when those who love best will say in a reverent way: 'we ought to be thankful her sufferings are at an end.' They don't mean that. They mean: 'I'm thankful she's gone.' Don't I understand human nature?"

She sank back exhausted.

"You may be right," he replied, as the force of her words possessed him. "You've been very happy?"

She pressed his hand, her face brightened, and she strove to raise herself.

"Inexpressibly happy! God has blessed me abundantly in my husband. Oh, how good he has been to me!"

Her emotions choked her. She lay back on the cushions, closed her eyes, tears wetting her face. He drew a handkerchief and dried them gently, smoothing her hair.

"Yes," he remarked, "and he'll remain devoted to all your wishes."

She turned quickly and with an effort regained her voice:

"I know he will, and for that I want to see you. We've been preparing for the inevitable. I have a wish, a dear, cherished, dying wish; and Ralph has agreed that it may be fulfilled. Our son, our little Ralph, will be motherless. I want Vezia to rear him, and you to supervise his education. Will you do this for me?"

"Gladly, gladly! I know Vezia will join in your wish heartily."

"Bless you! B-1-e-s-s-y-o-u!"

She laid her face in his hand, overcome, sobbing. The marble clock ticked faintly, it's golden pendulum swinging this woman's life away. From another room came baby's cooing, reaching her ears. She raised her head, listened to his prattle, fixed her eyes on the pastor's face beseechingly, shook her head sadly, murmured something unintelligibly, dropped her face into his palm again. His prompt acquiescence brought her happiness that sobs and weeps. Her concern for the welfare of her offspring was excessively solicitous, as the concerns of dying. mothers always are. Progeneration, undertaken under any circumstances, brooks no denial in it's exactions. Mrs. Chandler trembled with this desire for her child, and could not rest until she obtained the promise. It would have been impossible for Vezia to have contemplated such anxiety as Armita's; she was incapable. The day before Mrs. Chandler had purposely omitted reference to the subject. She reflected now on the reason which impelled her to forbear reference to it, wondering if Mr. Meserve's acquiescence was based upon the same reason? Vezia had confided a secret to Armita which filled the invalid with joy; a secret she wanted to discuss with her pastor. Would it be becoming? Her delicacy was exceptional.

"Vezia will be very happy."

He was deeply buried in thought and scarcely heard her whisper, but he nodded:

"Yes."

"It will make you very happy, too?"

He thought she spoke of the care of her son.

"Yes, very happy."

"I'm so glad," she murmured, stroking his hand.
"It makes me happy to know it's so."

He nodded.

"Vezia is robust?" she remarked.

He looked at her. Her face was slightly turned away.

"It will prove a blessing to both of you," she continued.

He concluded something had escaped his hearing.

"I had hoped I might live to see the day," she went on.

He thought her flighty.

"I feel a personal interest, you know, Vezia's been so dear to me. Wouldn't I be proud to be god-mother!" She smiled, pressed his hand gently, gazing toward the wall.

He watched her, unable to account for her remarks. She seemed lucid. He rested an elbow on his knee and studied her face. Was she wandering?

"It will all be for the best, all for the best. It will shed such light into your home and you'll have so much more to live for, and be drawn so much more closely to each other. There is nothing draws husband and wife like —."

She turned and looked at him. His expression told her she had betrayed the secret. She was horrified at her imprudence. Then perceiving his bewilderment she smiled and added:

"You mustn't mind me. You know I say anything I've a mind to to you and Vezia."

"I'm pleased to see you smile," he said. "You look really like yourself."

But something disturbed his mind. What she said made him think and wonder. Meanwhile Mrs. Chandler thought of the day she and Vezia exchanged secrets and she brightened and said:

"I often smile when I think how zealously Vezia and I guarded our love affairs. We were very diplomatic, very adroit."

He wondered if his wife wasn't still diplomatic? The word seemed expressive. As he heard the cooings of little Ralph his heart gave great bounds; he felt blood mantling his face; an almost uncontrollable desire to rush home and set his mind at ease.

She observed his animation and concluded he knew all; but she dared not again venture reference to what was uppermost in her mind, so inseparably associated with her's and Vezia's girlish secrets.

Returning to his duty Mr. Meserve introduced a vein of religious thought.

"We miss you at church, and I miss you much in those personal labors you volunteered."

"Surround my husband with your influence," she replied, "and teach my boy the Grace his mother believed in and you will have faithful disciples to keep my good works ever before you."

"Happily, yes, in a measure; the more so, perhaps since he knows it is your wish."

"I feel the utmost peace and satisfaction in knowing mine will share with your own in your solicitude."

This remark was made with such naturalness, and from forgetfulness of his ignorance of matters, that Armita did not feel conscious of its impression; but like a flash the import of her words came to him, and he felt unnerved, giddy. The hope of his life lived in her thoughtless speech. The croonings of little Ralph echoed in his heart, creating the thrill a man experiences when possible fatherhood dawns upon him. For Hollis Meserve to know, to be encouraged to believe even that he was to be a father, caused unbounded happiness. He could scarcely retain his

seat so electrified was he by the thought. He wanted to embrace Mrs. Chandler for giving him that hope. Happy men have impulses to do foolish things. His face took on a look of accord with her predictions, his breast swelled with pride, he saw a picture of two children, one their's, the other her's; he heard the prattle of infancy in his study; he wanted to shout in his joy! Professional dignity was consumed by delirium; he was forgetting himself and paused to reflect there was confidence between him and this friend which had not been fully revealed, and could not be revealed unless he betrayed his ignorance. It was the dignified minister versus the delighted man. Propriety required he preserve decorum, so he hastened to terminate the interview already protracted. His leave-taking was forced and nervous. Mrs. Chandler observed this, forgiving his exuberance. With a promise to see her again in a day or two he hastened from the house into the warmth of the autumn noonday.

His heart bursting with happiness he crossed to the Common and took a seat. He was too overjoyed to move. Under the great trees, in the cool shade of the western slope overlooking the parade ground, he sat, with bared head, trying to contemplate the blessing. Yet, amid his exultation came a quiver of pain. Why had Vezia concealed this from him? Why had she not hastened to share happiness with

one most deserving to know, most interested to partake of the tidings? That she was naturally secretive did not occur to him. But that would furnish no excuse for her silence. He reasoned numberless theories for her reticence, but none were satisfactory. Hither and thither passed nurses attending toddling cherubs; trundling sleeping infants in basket carriages. None escaped his observation. He scanned their faces, smiled upon them, guessed their ages, fancied their resemblance to parents. For the newsboy, the bootblack, the urchin by the gate, he had a word, a smile, a penny. But he could not help wondering if their mothers kept knowledge of their conception from their fathers; and asked himself if that was natural for a mother to do? Absorption of theology had left him little time for penetration of human nature. He knew nothing of the caprices of promissory mothers. His was a father's jubilation, extravagant, wild, rugged, fierce. His glee made him long to be boisterous; but upon his uprising fancies fell the damp of marvel why Vezia had not taken him into her confidence? Twice he started from the bench to hurry home and embrace her and rejoice with her. A little tot fell right in front of him and cut her face. He wept from fright. A couple of children playing with a ball amused him so he forgot himself. When he reflected his judgment told him to wait; to let her volunteer the confidence; to believe she was natural; and so on, conjuring whimsical fallacies to spare his wife well-meant congratulations. At length, filled with a joy that was tempered with prudence, he sauntered from the mall, and reached home.

His wife was out.



"THE GREATEST CRIME IN THE WORLD."

"And the Dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed."—Revelation, 12, 17.

Everything in nature was bright and mellow the morning of Mrs. Chandler's funeral. A perfect day for farewell to perfect clay. Thus it impressed Mr. Meserve as he paced his study arranging thoughts for the church obsequies. How fitting it seemed? In a ruby sunset her soul took flight, her husband holding her hand, her eyes upon the unflecked azure, a pet wren tweeting in the open window, her babe prattling as if it's innocent happiness sped her on the eternal journey. One wish of her's was ungratified. She wanted Vezia. Mr. Chandler sent a pathetic message imploring her, and Mr. Meserve supplemented an imperative demand; but she did not come. The dark eyes wandered from window to door watching for her to enter. They halted, fluttered, stood still forever. Her last breath fashioned Vezia's name, and her last thought was of her. Something oppressed her she wanted to

arrange before her departure. Thus it seemed to the pastor watching closely while he read and repeated favorite portions of Scripture. When he saw the mist gathering and the wavering eagerness of expression, he felt something was unfinished. She turned to him and tried to speak. After she was dead he longed for those words. He felt he should have he ard them. They were something about Vezia, maybe a message to her. But she died, the words unspoken, the wish ungratified. This morning, while collecting thoughts he must voice from the pulpit, there stole into his brain memory of the dying woman and that last, longing, lingering look.

When Mr. Meserve returned home after Mrs. Chandler's death, he found his wife prostrated, in bed. He could not under such circumstances, reprove her for ignoring repeated and urgent calls from her friend's bedside; but he marvelled she had so suddenly become indisposed. When he left her she seemed in good health and spirits. Vezia's vigor was remarkable, her buoyancy surmounting; and this sudden prostration alarmed him. Her anguish over the death of her friend and her protestations that it had entirely unnerved her, appeased his fancies and obliged him to excuse her absence. Still he could not forget Armita's desire. It was not delirium. Her death was composed and rational.

It was intense eagerness; responsibility for something; speech lost forever in death's muteness. detected an unwillingness on his wife's part to visit Mrs. Chandler toward the last. For a few days prior to dissolution she had kept away. He could not forget how strangely anxious Armita had looked, nor the unsaid something on her lips. Vezia expressed no desire to visit the house after death. She ordered flowers and made inquiries regarding the exercises; but evinced no wish to look upon the face of the departed. Nor did she ask for little Ralph, made one of the minister's family. Mr. Meserve fathomed every caprice to account for this strange conduct. He went so far as to attribute it to her pregnancy. Her manner was unaccountable, and when, this morning, she declined to arise, saying she was not strong enough to endure the ordeal of the services, he was speechless! He could not disabuse his mind of an undercurrent. There was something below the surface, behind her words. Hence, as he strove to conform his mind to the duty of the hour, to collect the virtues of the departed for a lesson beside the bier, the qualities of Mrs. Chandler's life appeared diametrically opposite those he was compelled to confess to be his wife's.

"My dear," he said, sitting on the side of the bed and taking her hand, "I cannot reconcile myself to your reluctance to participate in Armita's obsequies. Why have you shrunk from these past few days?"

In the dim light of the chamber he could not see the look in her eyes; nor is it probable he would have comprehended had he seen the way her eyes closed and her lips compressed, as people use eyes and lips when they have a determination fixed they dare not share.

"I'm not well!" she replied peevishly. "You oughtn't to insist upon my doing what is not best for me! I don't feel equal to the publicity of the occasion!"

There was lurking implication in these words a more astute student of human nature would have analyzed. The shrinking from publicity meant something. He was incompetent to analyze it. He kissed her affectionately and started for the Chandlers'.

Left to her meditations and resolutions, Vezia lay for a time in study. To describe her feelings is impossible. She paid her last visit four days before the death, when conversation was possible, when it had for theme approaching events for herself. Vezia had scarcely confided in Armita and seen her joy when she regretted having spoken. The cause of this regret was a hideous resolution; a base, unholy, cruel determination she dared not announce. That resolution slunk into her mind afraid to show itself;

too malicious for confidence, too brutal for companionship. It was the germinated recollection of the eleven ghosts of injustice and usurpation which bore her family name; who had the same father; who had forced her from home. It was also the outgrowth of Armita's sacrifice. There was some fear in it, some dread of transmitting, some horror of plebian composition. In fervor of confidence she told Armita of her pregnancy. Instantly she was sorry, because its consummation was already shaken by frightful plans she shivered to entertain. Now as she lay and heard the voice of little Ralph in the adjoining room, his mother's sufferings and sacrifices appalled her! Reminded of how she had been forced from her home by an unfeeling step-parent, how could she know, should she die, that Mr. Meserve would not marry again, and perhaps her child be treated as she had been, and also forced from home? She was ashamed to stand beside the bier of her dead friend with such resolutions in her heart. She feared they might be dispersed. She might not have courage to execute them. She had put her husband from her thought, ignoring his wishes, excluding him from the purpose, glad to be left alone to execute it. She was not unmindful of the danger, nor of the sin, nor of the shame; but, womanlike, she dared. She had chosen the present occasion because certain of her husband's absence. The knowledge she must be

a mother to Armita's son made her more eager to carry out her determination. She schooled herself to the critical. It was no shock to her refinement; not forbidding; she had no fear of consequences, no remorse of conscience. She was simply sorry she married. She dreaded being like her step-mother, or like the mother of the cripple. She did not stop to consider that what she was about to do might result fatally, or produce exactly what she despised in the leer-eyed cripple. She did not feel it was unholy, unworthy a wife, unbecoming a woman, criminal in a mother! She simply felt she *must*; she resolved she would; and she DID.

* * * * * *

When Mr. Meserve turned away from the grave and arm-in-arm with the husband re-entered the carriage and was driven back to town, there was something indefinably disagreeable in his mind. He was oppressed; felt he was going to hear bad news, as one feels one's thumb prickle. In the silence of the mourner's carriage he had opportunity for reflection. His mind dwelt upon an oppressiveness which impelled him homeward.

The carriage left him at his door. After speaking a few words of consolation to the bereaved husband he entered his home. He went first to the study, changed his coat and sat at the desk. But he was

restless, uneasy; and arose and sought his wife's chamber.

The door was locked.

He rapped. Again, more loudly. All was silent. Alarm possessed him! He called to the servant, asking if Mrs. Meserve had gone out? She had not. He rapped again; and receiving no reply, pressed his shoulder against the door and burst it in!

Upon the floor lay Vezia, clad only in her night robe. Her attitude was one of intense agony. Quickly raising her and laying her on the bed a dreadful horror crossed his mind. He sent the servant for their physician, while laboring himself for restoration. In a few moments the doctor arrived and shortly Vezia opened her eyes to burst into tears. The men looked at each other. Their intelligence was mutual. Mr. Meserve was about to retire to his study when his eye rested upon an open parcel upon the dressing case. He started to examine it, when the doctor approached, picked it up and scrutinized it closely. The husband felt cold and giddy, and thought of the hurrying messenger boy as the doctor fixed cold, calm eyes on his face, which said volumes. Neither man spoke. The only sounds were little Ralph's prattle and Mrs. Meserve's sobs.

UNFORGIVEN.

When the unhappy husband raised his head from his desk hours afterward he, too, was sincerely sorry he had married. He was bruised. His heart, brain, nerves were lame and hurt. He was more than disappointed, he was distrustful. He could account for his wife's action upon no other ground than an endeavor to hide unfaithfulness, to destroy evidence of treachery. The more he thought his belief in her deceit deepened. He had heard of dishonorable women doing what she had done, but he could not believe a true wife capable of such a thing. It was agony to his highmindedness, a terrible wound to his pride, a blow to his honor.

There was a tap on the door and the physician entered.

"Well?"

Doctor Bird shook his head.

"She's in a very bad way. I don't want to alarm you, but be prepared for what may occur. There are chances she may not recover."

Not a pang went to the husband's heart. He felt stolid unconcern. Had she been at that instant in the shadow of death he could have gone to her, fondled her, wept over her. But he was sure that feeling was going to wear away lingering over her sin.

"I don't know as I care much," he muttered dropping his head into his hand.

"Oh, you mustn't talk so!" said the doctor, halting in his walk about the room. "This has unnerved you! You're excited! Try and look at it rationally."

- "Rationally!" exclaimed Mr. Meserve, looking at the doctor contemptuously. "Do you suppose I can't see? Do you think me blind?"

"No, no. But you're too sensitive to circumstances. You're inexperienced in such matters, Hollis," and the doctor smiled in the fixed face of the minister.

Mr. Meserve was undesirous of continuing conversation on the subject. The doctor strode back and forth, waiting to be interrogated. Suddenly Mr. Meserve looked up.

"Is this any proof of infidelity?"

"None in the least," was the ready reply. "You have the same self-deception husbands often indulge, doing grievous injustice to innocent women. Your wife is thoroughly true."

"Do you think so?" surprised to hear the doctor's assurance.

Doctor Bird looked at Mr. Meserve, amazed at his persistent suspicion.

"Do I think so? What leads you to think differently? Why do you put your wife on trial at the bar of your imagination?"

"Indications! Indications! They are convincing to me! Beside, there's no other explanation?"

The doctor smiled as he walked.

"Two very unsustainable conclusions. I've talked with your wife."

Mr. Meserve glanced up; but when the doctor hesitated, he shrugged his shoulders, prepared to doubt whatever explanation might be offered. The doctor noticed this, stopped, leaned against the desk, putting his hands under his coat-tails, and looked at Mr. Meserve with a quizzical, penetrating gaze.

"Hollis, you are either perverse, or inconceivably innocent. I don't believe you understand your wife. I doubt if you ever understood her. Such a thing's possible, you'll admit?"

Mr. Meserve kept his eyes on the floor, leaning back in his chair attentively.

"I don't know that I'm ready to concede your premises or to accept the extenuation you're prepared to offer."

"Oh, I'm not going to offer any extenuation. I disapprove of women's freaks; but you've always seemed to me to be totally ignorant of the female sex."

"I guess I am," replied the husband, nodding his head discouragedly.

"Well, has it never occurred to you that it is a husband's duty to know as much about his wife as she knows about herself?"

"I wasn't aware that was his province."

"There you are. It's such husbands as you, who don't feel they ought to know any more about their wives than their wives are willing to tell them, who are fooled."

"Fooled!" exclaimed Mr. Meserve, starting up in his chair. "Then you'll admit I've been fooled?"

"Yes, you've been deceived."

The Doctor saw the husband's countenance fall, and thought he might be misunderstood.

"But when I say deceived, Hollis, I don't mean you've been deceived in your wife. You've only been deceived by her."

"Deceived by her?"

"Yes, and by her associates."

The doctor had resumed his walk about the study. Mr. Meserve followed him with his eyes.

" Associates?"

"Yes, advisers."

"Advisers?"

"Yes. Don't you know that married women knowing their husbands are blind take, counsel with other women?"

The minister shook his head.

The doctor explained: "Oh, yes, that's an every day occurrence. If you had drawn your wife into your confidence by display of knowledge of woman-kind every married woman respects in her husband, this wouldn't have occurred."

Conviction of logic dawned upon the husband.

"And she has been wrongly advised?"

"Beyond doubt. She's not confessed to me by whom, but I think I could name the party."

"Who?"

When he asked this question remembrance of Armita's anxiety in her last moments flashed across Mr. Meserve's mind. He trembled to hear the name.

"Mrs. Falling," said the doctor, quietly.

Mr. Meserve drew a long breath, nodding his head thankfully.

"A very constant visitor here, a member of my church, an old-time friend."

"They're always old-time friends, Hollis, and experienced, too. Yes, I'm sure it was Mrs. Falling."

"You are her physician?" enquired Mr. Meserve.

The doctor flashed him a look which asked: "Where do you think my professional principle is?"

"Oh, no. She used to be a friend of my wife's."

The clergyman nodded his head understandingly; leaned his elbows on his knees; grew less uneasy; began to comprehend.

"I don't think Mrs. Falling has much need for doctors. She's very skillful."

With this remark Doctor Bird passed into the hall on his return to the sick's room.

Mr. Meserve remained in meditation. The utterances of the doctor had not fallen upon a stupid mind. Had those remarks made him less indifferent to his wife's recovery? He wasn't prepared to say. He felt chagrined for being preyed upon; vexed for being ignorant of the ordinary concerns of matrimonial life. He grew anxious she should escape, and felt determined to acquire knowledge of womankind to be able to cope with his wife's advisers. he thought this over he became exceedingly anxious she should recover, impatient to demonstrate his capability to manage a household. He became alive to the influence of the widow, of the menace to his domesticity, of the ruin she had plotted against his happiness. Strange recollections were revived. Gossip of Colonel Falling's brave death upon the Bull Run battle field always accompanied whispers concerning his widow; her fondness for the society of young women; their admiration for her; her conspicuous avoidance of male society; her proclamation she'd never marry again; her abandonment of her son by sending him off to sea. All these came back to Mr. Meserve and he wondered he hadn't noticed Mrs. Falling's intimacy with his wife.

The doctor entered, coat and hat in hand. "I'll be back later. She's quite easy."

He was gone before the husband framed a question he wished to propound. Lapsing into contemplation he realized the necessity of establishing dignity as a husband. In the face of the effront perpetrated he must be self-assertive. He fell into popular error and saw only his wounded pride. He grew selfish to forget his chagrin. He wanted her to become hearty, strong, vigorous again that he might punish He lost Christian charity. He ignored her claim to pardon for this mistake which might have cost her her life. He became arbitrary at heart. He became immovably determined to wield the rule of iron a negligent husband feels sensitive to when his negligence dawns upon him and he wants to lay it upon his wife. He knew he ought to go and see her and comfort her and forgive her. But he was too stubborn. That would be soft, weak, yielding. He called to the nurse to bring Ralph to him and sent her to sit by Mrs. Meserve. With the tiny bit of innocence on his knee; looking into the living reflection of the face he had that day laid away forever, the dead mother's virtues magnified. Paramount her motherhood. That stood out the virtue his wife had shunned, abused, failed in. Little Ralph nestled into his arms, and his tugging sprawl delighted him! He could have held the child forever. How the parental appetite grew on him! How he pressed the human atom to his heart envious of his father! This was the most inflammable fuel he could have fed the resentment toward his wife. The child's touch excited his abhorance of her sin. The longer he held him the more he angered toward her. Alarmed at his feelings he called the nurse and resigned Ralph to her care. As the baby face disappeared down the hall he turned and closed the door, muttering:

"There would have been two to train."

Slowly he paced the room as the doctor had done, but moved by different feelings. How different! The clear insight the doctor had of the situation was very different from the view of the wounded, humiliated husband. The situation merely annoyed the doctor. He disliked his patients to be thus prostrated. He wasn't a religious man; although his wife was of the Burr street church. The close contact of medical professors with human nature and it's multitudinous frailties tends to steel them against emotions. Doctor Bird's practice was largely among the Burr street congregation, and he knew more of their private lives than any other single individual,

certainly more than their pastor. This enabled him to speak assuredly about Mrs. Falling, and her influence over Mrs. Meserve. Not that he was blind to the fact that, had Mrs. Falling not been in Mrs. Meserve's confidence, she would have acted upon her own impulses and the same incident would have transpired. Mrs. Meserve told him everything. She confessed her dread of the fate of her step mother; her horror of Armita's motherhood with it's seeds of insidious disease; her recollection of the cripple; her remembrance of Mrs. Falling's remark about blue blood. It was this reference to Mrs. Falling led the doctor to enquire what part she played in the disastrous result? And he learned that which did not surprise him, but warranted him in admonishing Mr. Meserve that the widow's influence was detrimental to his domestic happiness. He had been family physician to the Fallings in by-gone days, until professional honor obliged him to sever that relationship. He regarded young Frank Falling a spark burning in life despite his mother's influence at extinction. He conceived for the woman a justifiable antipathy. He knew the havoc she had wrought in many lives. Her influence with Mrs. Meserve had only been auxiliary, though; abetting a determination previously conceived. It wasn't dread of Vezia's not rallying made the doctor uneasy. It was knowledge she had undergone contamination every such event accomplishes in woman. The terrible sequences are an indelible blight, which Holy Writ pronounces the wrath of the dragon, waging war unto the remnant of her seed. Yet Doctor Bird made it a rule never to discuss this point; but he had never known it to fail that the brutality of such acts found expression in subsequent conception. The meagerness of Mrs. Falling's influence increased his solicitude; for he saw that Mrs. Meserve's own perverse notions were mainly responsible for what had happened.

Mr. Meserve did not entertain an inkling of all this. But he formed determinations from an entirely different standpoint. He felt it to be utterly impossible for him to feel toward his wife as he had in the past. He must be content to rear the orphaned son of Armita and banish the cherished wish of his life; the wish Armita outlined to Vezia that spring afternoon; the wish Vezia realized as Armita told her she would, but which she hadn't the moral courage to execute. It was a struggle on his part which terminated in this resolution. It meant everything to him. It was overturning human hope, and pouring into the river of despair every crystal of promise. Young, sanguine, devoted husbands do not form such determinations without seasoning their cup with bitterness. It is hard tearing the chords of a

man's heart, uprooting the tendrils of his being; but no man with self respect can overlook deliberate insult to his manhood and to his honor as a husband. That was Meserve's position. Neither Christianity, nor sense of right, nor conjugal fidelity, permitted his condoning so heinous a wrong. He was not unlike other men in this. They don't always take the same heroic measures, but they are none the less exercised, none the less disappointed, none the less disgusted! Oft'times there are reasons which forbid severe administration of domestic authority. They condone, forgive, appear to forget. But the wound never heals. However thorough may seem the adhesion of domestic breaches a scar remains. Mr. Meserve lacked worldly diplomacy, which prompts a wronged husband to overlook his wife's cowardice; nor had he any ulterior point to gain by dissembling. He had set his heart on being a father. Her tacit acquiescence left him unprepared for this deceit. His resentment was bitter. He reasoned quickly and decisively, and resolved irrevocably. Henceforth he and Vezia must live differently. He owed this to his manhood, to his profession, to his self-respect. Such a woman as she could not be wife to him.

This fixed intent occupying him he halted an instant at her door as he noiselessly retired to his chamber. The doctor was there, talking. She was

repentant and weeping. He was advising her kindly and wisely. Their voices were audible. She was confidential. When he had heard all he could bear, he wearily ascended the stairs to his room.



TEMPTATION.

From enforced retirement Vezia emerged to find everything desolate and forbidding. It was not a shock, nor a surprise. She knew her husband sufficiently to comprehend his attitude. Confidence in successful secrecy had made her audacious. She arose to meet indifference and coldness. She was rebellious. She felt lonely, neglected, ill-treated. She did not relish the society of Armita's boy, but she must have diversion, so she kept him with her until he became a necessity to her existence. Every day Mr. Chandler called to see his son, and every afternoon his carriage took Vezia and Ralph driving. Mr. Chandler did not close his house; and frequently invited Mr. and Mrs. Meserve to bring Ralph and dine with him. The guests were always Vezia and the boy; never Mr. Meserve.

Close study of Vezia's manner told Mr. Chandler something was wrong between the pastor and his wife. Her devotion to his son won his sympathy and interest. Conscious of something affecting her

happiness, he went out of his way to exhibit kindness, and to indicate appreciation of devotion to his motherless child. At first he was prompted to this by purest pity for an unhappy woman, whose sad face and dejected air betrayed her state of mind to the watchful man of affairs. While she was becoming attached to the boy, Mr. Chandler was acquiring an interest in her which developed from gratitude into ardent passion. There was nothing premeditated in this. It was voluntary, irresistible. For months he fought it successfully; but daily sight of her grieved countenance, and multiplying evidences of her husband's neglect, preyed upon his mind until he could no longer repress curiosity to fathom the mystery. He did not venture without counting cost, risk, penalty. He knew invasion of a man's domestic circle, be the plea what it may, is unwarrantable. But Vezia so controlled and occupied him, and her plight appealed so strongly to his sympathy, and her devotion to his child so endeared her to him, he could not withstand temptation to cultivate her confidence.

They had returned from a drive. The nurse took the boy from the table to put him to sleep, leaving Mr. Chandler and Mrs. Meserve sipping wine and chatting pleasantly over a call they paid in Brookline. He suddenly placed his elbows on the table and gazing at her said:

"Why are you so unhappy?"

She flashed her blue eyes into his a moment, then dropped them, blushed, and stammered:

"I'm not unhappy."

"Yes, you are, and you have been unhappy ever since 'Mita died. She was very dear to you, Vezia?" She nodded.

"Have you missed her so much?"

"I miss her very much," she replied; but he knew that did not express her mind.

"You have been very good to Ralph, Vezia."

"He has become very dear to me."

"Hasn't he wrought harm between you and Hollis?"

"No," she replied, firmly, "he has not."

"I feared he had; for you and he don't seem as happy as you used to be?"

It was only this little perception that was needed; something to uncover the wells of those eyes and let the torrent of misery forth. She dropped her head upon her arm on the table and burst into tears. Carried completely away by this exhibition of grief, so unexpected; transported by pity for the woman who had given herself for his child; he sprang to his feet, hurried around the table, and caught her in his arms and pressed her to his breast. In the bewildering pathos of the situation he was unmindful of propriety. This woman, stamped with unspeakable

suffering had been the truest of mothers to his boy. Her outburst wrung his heart. The compromising character of the situation dawned upon him, but her trembling arms encircled his neck, her quivering lips pressed close to his breast, completely disarmed every impulse to retrace. He felt the hunger in her embrace; the starving clutch of her arms trembling to be caressed; and he caught up her wet face and kissed every feature. She looked into his eyes gratefully. To her craving nature those kisses were as water to a parched throat. She stared at him appealingly, as if it lay in his power to bless her. She was weak and fainting; must succomb to her emotions. Thought of what they were daring came upon them and they withdrew from close embrace to gaze at each other. She looked alarmed; he abashed. But they did not separate. By degrees, to once again partake of the delicious sympathy of a fleeting moment, their arms entwined; their faces came closer; their lips met in deliberate, prolonged expression of trust and fidelity, which the world denominates harshly. An hour elapsed in this manner, without word, without interruption of caress, without cessation of happiness. Then, calmed by vehemence of expression, he arose and took a seat beside her. She nestled to him. No longer was there any pained look in her face. She smiled, clasped his hand in hers, leaned forward, gazing into

his face, slave to the rapture of discovered affinity. There was something beautiful in this innocence of infidelity. It was womanly, spontaneous. appeared to her a natural drift of things. had to be; was inevitable. Throughout her life, until this moment, she had curbed emotion. She could do so no longer. Through the medium of little Ralph his father and proxy mother were drawn to each other, with no valorous husband to stay temptation. In the months Mr. Meserve had been punishing his wife, she had been training her indignant heart to punish him; and Mr. Chandler's spontaneous love placed the weapon in her hand. This mutual revelation was more powerful than anything premeditated could have been. When he found speech he told her of his lonely heart. It found sympathy in her ignored, deprived nature. They were absolved by their intoxicated consciences, and pledged to one another by that bond which is as imperious as it is lawlesss. She clung to him because he slaked her thirst. He gave her the devotion she craved above everything else in life.

"No, it is not Ralph has wrought our unhappiness," she said, reluctantly answering his repeated query. "I've been the cause of our estrangement myself; but don't ask me to explain. I confess it's all my fault; but, oh, he's punished me!" She set her lips remembering what she had endured.

"And you so capable of affection? I cannot understand how this can be? I had hoped ere this to see you, too, a mother?"

She dropped her head on his breast and sobbed. He knew he had touched the chord.

"And is this to go on indefinitely?" he asked.

"God knows!" she cried. "It cannot! Oh, I'm so miserable, so unhappy! What will become of me? Oh, Ralph, Ralph, I cannot be treated as I have been! It will kill me! I've done wrong to be so weak tonight, but I couldn't help it!"

She lay in his arms, a fluttering, wounded heart. All was still within the great mansion. In that dining room sombre shadows gathered, as there came to these two souls the appalling force of the irresistible. The hush and dimness extended hands to lurking temptation. They felt it encompassing them as men and women feel the stealthy approach of sweet sensibilities that will master them. As the shadows deepened, their ensnarement gathered until the chasm suddenly yawned at Vezia's feet! She sprang up and fled from the room! Into the hall she ran, calling the nurse to follow her with the child! Out into the street and hurriedly homeward!

Her eyes fixed before her, her face burning with terror, her breath coming shorter and quicker, Vezia rushed up the steps, pushed past the servant, flew up the stairs to her husband's study. Never had she intruded without knocking; but she bolted in, and before he had time to turn in his chair, she cast herself at his feet, trembling and hysterical. Moved by the suddenness and novelty of this proceeding, Mr. Meserve raised her in his arms, and wheeling an arm chair before the hearth, drew her into his lap. He drew her head against his breast, soothed and fondled her as in the old days, when it was a happiness. Now it was only a duty. She was ill, nervous, and made an appeal to him. Touch is messenger of the soul. Vezia could tell her husband's caresses lacked heart. He was bestowing them because he felt he ought to. She started up and looked him in the face.

"I've been held as you are holding me! I've been caressed as you're caressing me! I've been kissed, but you don't kiss me! Oh, Hollis! Hollis! Hollis!"

A shiver passed through him. She must be bereft of reason! He was bewildered!

After this vehement confession Vezia sank into his arms and moaned; swaying and holding her head in her hands. Before he recovered she exclaimed:

"Hollis, I've been tempted! I've almost fallen! I'm in danger! Help me! Save me! Save your wife, Hollis!" Poor, dazed, bewildered Meserve! He did not know what to make of her.

"Hush, dear," he whispered, affecting a serenity that exasperated her.

"Hush!" she repeated, dropping to the floor at his feet and clasping his knees frantically. "I tell you, Hollis Meserve, you're driving me to sin! Do you think any woman can bear this treatment? Mark what 'I say! You're driving me, me, ME—your wife—your Vezia—who has always been a true, faithful wife—you're driving me into the arms of another! YOU HAVE DRIVEN ME THERE!"

She shrieked this fearful sentence, and it seemed to arouse the dormant vitality of the man. He grew pale; fastened his eyes upon her; caught her in his arms pleadingly.

"Who? Tell me, Vezia? Who? What do you mean? Who has dared—"

"Never! You shall never know! He's noble, true! He has made me love him as I love my existence! I'll never betray him! Never utter his name! He has tempted me! I would willingly expire in his embrace at this moment! You hear me, Hollis! I love him so I would give my life to be his! But I'm yours! You must take me! keep me! protect me from him and from myself!"

Completely exhausted by this declamation she fell upon her face. Across his mind came sweep of sus-

picion. Disregarding her condition, zealous only to satisfy his doubt, he leaned over her and demanded, with deliberate emphasis:

"Is your lover Ralph Chandler?"

"NO!"

Then she fainted.



PART THREE.

THE WRATH OF THE DRAGON.

Two ladies and a young gentleman seated upon the broad veranda of a stately mansion situate in a forest of maples, remote from the highway. It was a late July afternoon. They occasionally peered between the trees when the shrill whistle of a locomotive was heard. In the distance could be seen a little lead-colored depot where way trains stopped. Evidently some one was expected; for a liveried coachman stood beside a brightly painted drag, to which hostlers were hitching a pair of blooded cobs.

"You'd better hurry, Dan," exclaimed the young man, addressing the coachman, from the end of the porch where he had sauntered, leisurely puffing a cigarette and throwing back the lapels of his white flannel jacket, exposing a negligee of blue silk. "The up train has just left Lowell."

The coachman touched his hat, sprang onto the box, cracked his whip and the lawn was clouded in dust as the spirited horses dashed into the road.

"If father isn't on that train I don't believe he'll come up tonight," continued Mr. Ralph Chandler, Jr., resuming his seat in the rattan rocker and leaning over to watch his team of favorite ponies trotting down the pike toward the depot.

"Oh, he'll not fail to come!" exclaimed the younger of the ladies, raising her eyes from the Angora kitten she was petting. "He promised to take us to the boat race tonight. Who do you think will win?"

"I'd be inclined to bet on the Belvideres," replied young Mr. Chandler, intent on the train drawing up to the depot.

"Their colors are red, aren't they?"

"Yes. There's father! He's just getting into the carriage."

This remark aroused the elder lady; who raised herself languidly in her chair, adjusting her glasses to catch a glimpse of the approaching carriage. Despite her silvered hair and changed figure, Vezia Meserve was too individual to leave opportunity for query. She was attired in white. In her luxurious tresses of mingled silver and gold, a jewelled sword; and at her throat a single gem of great beauty. She was considerably stouter than formerly; her face fuller; her cheeks more brilliant; her entire appearance denoting luxury and indolence.

The young lady by her side was unmistakably her daughter. The same hair, Vezia's former girlish figure, but her father's eyes and pose of head. Her features were as delicately chiselled as her mother's, but there were depth and penetration of eyes which were neither father's nor mother's. They were original; and while, at first glance, they passed for liquid fullness of orbs, closer scrutiny showed a flash and unrest not agreeable. Her voice was her father's; rich, full, resonant; capable of imperiousness with her mother's spirit and force to give it ring of authority.

"Is your father accompanied by any one?" enquired Mrs. Meserve, adjusting her glasses to see more plainly. "It seems to me there are two persons in the carriage."

"No," replied Ralph, as the carriage wheeled into the driveway, "only father and Dan."

As the drag drew up to the steps Mr. Chandler, grayed and portly, wearing his beard closely cropped, alighted with the difficulty of a mature man who lives heartily. Ralph ran down and assisted him. Mrs. Meserve walked to the top of the steps, a smile on her handsome face, a tenderness in the blue eyes that peered through the glasses at the millionaire. But Beatrice did not rise. She watched the meeting between her mother and Mr. Chandler, and there was something in her look which did not indicate a pleased frame of mind.

"By Jove!" shouted the arrival in a brusque, ringing voice, "how cool you all look! Goodness! but it's been a scorcher in town today! Where's Ross? I want a claret punch! Ross!"

"I'll get it for you," said Mrs. Meserve, folding her fan and disappearing through the hall.

Beatrice's eyes followed her mother. There was a sneer on her lips.

Mr. Chandler threw off his coat, and dropped into a huge arm chair about which three enormous mastiffs clambered and barked.

"Beatrice says you promised to go over with us tonight to the boat race," said Ralph.

Mr. Chandler looked at the young lady, a moment, intently.

"So I did. But not one step will I go unless Miss Haughtiness gives me a kiss."

The girl arose, a sweet smile (clearly affected) on her face and tripped over to the big chair, perched herself on the arm, put her hand on the fleshy, florid neck of the over-heated mill-owner, and said:

"Now what sort of a kiss, please?"

"Don't you know?" asked Mr. Chandler, straining his plethoric neck to look in her face.

"I don't believe I do," she replied, smiling in return.

"Well, not too long, nor too brief; moist, soft, be-

witching; just such a kiss as you'd give any young man like me!"

She laughed and put her lips to his as if anxious to be done as quickly as possible.

"Now we go to the boat race; that's certain! My! but that was daintily done! Ah, here's my punch! Why do you rush about and get yourself all heated when Ross could have gotten it just as well?"

Mrs. Meserve handed him the tray with a glass of tempting punch upon it. He cast up into her face an expression of happiness and pride.

"I've hardly moved out of my chair all day," was her reply, as if to apologize for doing butler's work; and at the same time confessing it was a pleasure.

Beatrice retired from the porch. Ralph went onto the lawn to play with the dogs. Mr. Chandler leaned back in his chair and sipped his drink, while Mrs. Meserve sat opposite, watching him and chatting of household matters.

The existing order of things was the result of that evolution for which life's unaccountable vicissitudes are responsible. Nineteen years had elapsed since the fateful evening when a tempted wife grovelled at the feet of her husband, bade him repent his harshness and save her from the weakness of herself and the passion of another. That appeal had been fruitful. The minister, who devoutly adored his

beautiful wife, saw the folly of his demeanor, and placed about her the saving influence of love and confidence. A daughter's birth seemed to unite them more closely; and the cherished two minds to train, became Mr. Meserve's duty and pleasure. By reason of Vezia's adherance to her vow never to divulge the identity of her tempter, Mr. Chandler retained the clergyman's confidence: and little Ralph grew up under the tuition of the man to whom his departed mother had entrusted him. Years rolled on. Ralph Chandler grew richer; and his wife's influence withdrawn, he leaned more and more to a life incident to the possession of great wealth and power. He drifted into politics and was elected Governor of the State. He went to Congress. He only escaped a Senatorial career because the affairs of his vast business would not permit. His days and nights were occupied with interests seemingly illimitable. He had no time to think of making another marriage. His counting room and his club, with an hour at the Meserves, in the evening, to chat and pet his son, these were his only employments. He slowly relinquished religious interest, but increased his donations, fostering every project of Mr. Meserve's, contributing largely to Burr street church, which he developed from a chapel into a gorgeous sanctuary. He made a few visits to Europe; invested in English industries; founded a continental agency for his American productions; opened commerce with South American ports; ran out to California; bought interests in several railroads and mines; had his brokers in New York, Chicago, London; established mills in the south; built a palatial mansion on Blue Hill avenue; enlarged this magnificent country seat at Chelmsford; revived his racing stud; had the Herreshoffs build him a yacht big as an ocean racer; and pursued, with advancing years, the pace that kills. But it did not kill Ralph Chandler. He thrived upon it. His accumulating wealth led him into politics simply to flatter a vanity for power; he bought fast horses to breed faster ones; he kept his yacht for a day's fishing, or a run about the watering places; but amidst it all his active brain was coining gold, gleaning profits, and gladdening his generous heart with kindness to everybody, especially to the little woman who was the foster mother of his son. But he never forgot that evening in his dining room on Boylston street. Neither had Vezia forgotten it. Nor did she, upon the birth of her daughter, exhibit less concern for his son. For each she had affection, equal interest and devotion. The reconciliation with her husband was completed by the birth of Beatrice; and until Mr. Meserve's death, their conjugality was undisturbed. It cannot be said Vezia was unaffected by Mr. Chandler's marvelous success in life. Nor was she blind to his magnanimity. She delighted in his prosperity, in his elevation to office, in his widening influence in the world of commerce. Feeling the responsibility of rearing the heir to this enormous estate, she grew to have a vital concern in every project of the great business; and the hour occupied daily by his visit became ultimately devoted to unfolding his plans to her and to his son. Thus the growing youth and his adopted mother became mutually concerned in the affairs of the Governor. This did not lead to any deflection from the line of her duty to her husband and daughter. Mr. Meserve continued a devout servant of the Lord's, simple and unostentatious, beloved by his people, respected by the entire city, and mourned by all denominations when called to his reward.

Somehow Governor Chandler never could become interested in Beatrice. She seemed an interloper. She appeared an invader of a circle sacred through tender memories. As a child he paid little heed to her; as a young miss he felt only a slight acquaintance with her. Her mother noticed this, and felt the slight; but when she spoke to him about it, he explained his feeling so lucidly she understood.

Beatrice was the pet of her father. His preference had been for a daughter, and upon this girl he expended the volume of his sweet, gentle nature. But Beatrice was not a lovable child. The Gover-

nor was justified, in a measure, in disliking her. She was fretful, peevish, unreasonable, exacting. She was given to exhibitions of violent temper; frequently had sulks; possessed abnormal inclinations and propensities in her amusements and playmates. Vezia was, mother-like, blind to these; her father also. But the Governor discerned that the companion of his son was an "odd stick," and he did not particularly care for them to mingle too much together. As Beatrice grew older these traits largely disappeared. She became more sweetnatured, affectionate, tractable; and bade fair to develop into an interesting woman. The first exhibition she gave of the traits of her child-hood was indifference respecting her father's death. Aside from being decidedly manish in her attire, rather hoydenish in her actions, she was conventionally well-behaved until her father passed away. To this fateful event she seemed unimpressionable. She did not miss him; nor weep for him; nor cherish his memory. On the other hand Ralph was heartbroken over the demise of his preceptor, grieving quite as deeply as if for his own father. The Governor noticed this, and was incensed at Beatrice for her insensibility. Her mother remarked it, but was silent. She did not fail to recognize the startling difference between her daughter and Ralph over the event.

It was more a whim of Governor Chandler's than anything else which led him to offer Mrs. Meserve and her daughter a home after the clergyman's death. To keep his valued circle complete became a pet project of the busy man who had only this little group to claim his devotion. The relations had been of so many years duration, it followed that Vezia and her daughter should feel more at home under his roof than elsewhere. Their pecuniary position rendered the arrangement advantageous. The clergyman left no estate. Beatrice was just "coming out," and her mother had high ambitions for her. Vezia hoped to make a match between her daughter and the Governor's son and heir. Ralph had thus far developed none of his mother's weakness, taking more after his father. Having been under her eye from infancy, Mrs. Meserve thoroughly understood the young man's character. She knew Beatrice was in no way calculated to be his wife; but shut her eyes to the incompatibility. She was ambitious for her child, though sensible to all deficiencies.

As Mrs. Meserve grew older she grew more diplomatic. Her lively interest in the Governor's affairs did much to cultivate this quality. She felt she would be doing a very commendable thing could she bring Beatrice and Ralph together. Not a syllable did she intimate to his father. She knew

he preferred making discoveries and effecting arrangements himself; one of those men, no matter how advantageous a thing may be, if it does not originate with him, is not to be adopted. She did everything in her power to make the Governor see that it was best for Ralph to marry Beatrice.

It was at the point where she discovered her plans miscarrying that we find Vezia Meserve this hot summer evening, sitting before the Governor, watching him sipping his punch, listening to his running chat upon business affairs. All day she had been revolving a vital question in her mind. How could she accomplish it? She learned Ralph was contemplating a trip abroad for sight-seeing. He had completed his course at Harvard; and before taking him into the counting room, his father proposed he make a tour of the world, "just to round off the corners." Vezia conceived an idea, and she had been dwelling upon it all day; for some days, in fact. It was deep, subtle. If her hair lately had an added grace; if her gown hung more gracefully; if her conversation was more lively; if her attentiveness to the Governor was more marked; there were purpose and intent therein. Beatrice observed this; unsuspected by her mother. This was what caused her to watch her mother so closely when the Governor drove up from the station; and it also kept her from being as sociable as usual, and sent her to her room

to dress for dinner. Not that she had the least objection to being step-daughter and daughter-in-law at the same time of the richest man in Massachusetts; but she was angry with herself for having made the discovery. She didn't care for She knew him too well. She would Ralph. have married him quickly enough, for the atmosphere of luxury tempted her greed. She had only one regret, poverty. Handling jewels as if they were chaff; seeing abundance wasted; enjoying the luxury of indolence; and being indulged by the good-hearted Governor as if she were his own daughter; had spoiled her. And yet, this was the least of the ills she labored under; others overshadowed her. Into the pith of this newly devised project of her mother's she had fallen accidentally, and it annoyed and piqued her.

Vezia had studied with all the skill she possessed to interest and attract the Governor. Nor without success. For months his brain had found relaxation contemplating the superb attractions of the clergyman's widow; dwelling upon her commendable qualities; analyzing the recommendations and objections to an alliance. But whenever serious thought took deep root he invariably reverted to that never-to-be-forgotten night in his dining room, when climax of possibility was only averted by the merest chance. Although diverting relations had grown up

between them, the dream of that moment never died from his memory. Tonight, as he leaned back in his chair, the surroundings encouraging leisure, he fixed his eyes upon the lovely woman, who, for more than twenty years he had seen almost daily; knew as well as man can know woman thus positioned; and asked himself if he should make her his wife? He felt sure she sometimes thought on the same subject, for there was a certain sweetness in her face, and an air of tenderness he delighted in. While thus cogitating, and just as the recollections of that night came to him, dinner was announced, and Beatrice and Ralph joined them.

The lofty, spacious dining hall of "The Maples" faced the south, and the evening breeze swept up from the broad, lengthy valley which sloped toward the river. The ladies in their light silks and the gentlemen in their negligees, lingered over wine and ices, discussing the social affairs of the summer community.

"I came up on the train this afternoon with Captain Falling," remarked the Govornor, snapping the ashes from his cigar. "That fellow's a cad, in my judgment. I never liked him, never knew him to be properly employed. In fact I've grave doubts about his right to the title he wears."

Mrs. Meserve flashed a look at Beatrice, who col-

ored, bit her lip; while Ralph, occupied with his ices, remarked, without raising his head:

"I'm afraid you're treading on dangerous ground, Pap. Beatrice is decidedly fond of the Captain."

The Governor glanced at the young lady, noticed her color and said, more emphatically:

"Oh, no! that can't be possible! Beatrice isn't partial to adventurers—"

He would have continued, but caught Mrs. Meserve's eye, which signalled him to desist.

"Beatrice met Captain Falling at the boat house at a hop not long ago, and was quite impressed by him," said the mother.

"H'm!" remarked the Governor, still looking at Beatrice, who was toying with a spoon. "At the boat house, eh? They tell me those hops are very swell, Beatrice?"

He had resumed his agreeable tone. Beatrice replied:

"That can hardly be if adventurers patronize them."

She gave the curl to her lip the Governor especially disliked. He adjusted his glasses and fixed his eyes on the downcast face, which retained its angry flush.

"No, hardly," he replied. "I'm surprised they receive the Captain."

"Well, they do receive him, and he's extremely popular with every one!"

"Too bad. I'm sorry," muttered the Governor, transferring his gaze to Mrs. Meserve, who was trying to prevent his continuing the conversation.

"Yes," spoke up Beatrice, seemingly encouraged by the taunting manner, "and he's anything but an adventurer, sir! he's a gentleman! He's proven that by speaking well of yourself!"

"Oh!" laughed the Governor, "that's no proof! Doubtless he's seeking to get into your good graces in order to borrow money from me. I'm told he has absolutely no means of support!"

Beatrice was becoming livid under this castigation of her friend.

"You remember his mother?" said the Governor, addressing Mrs. Meserve. "She was a member of Burr avenue church."

"Yes, I knew her."

"And she was much and unpleasantly talked about, too, you may remember?" he continued.

Mrs. Meserve colored, but made no reply. Beatrice was watching and observed the flush, but did not understand it.

"Oh, I guess Falling isn't the worst chap that ever lived," said Ralph, disposed to conciliate what he saw was brewing an unpleasant discussion. "Indeed you're right!" broke in Beatrice, thankful for some word for the Captain. "And I don't think your father ought to denounce a man of whom he really knows no harm!"

This stung the Governor's positive nature.

"I never make mistakes in judging character, Miss! I pronounce Captain Falling worthless; and I forbid him the hospitality of this house! I hope that's quite sufficient?"

It was sufficient to bring the conversation to a termination, and equally sufficient to dispose of the projected party to the boat race. The Governor and Mrs. Meserve strolled out onto the porch; Ralph went to the stable for his pony; and Beatrice walked to the end of the grounds, seating herself on one of the rustic benches and pretending to read. She was, however, dividing her attention between the tete-atete going on between her mother and the Governor; and watching the pathway leading from the road into the upper end of the grounds. She had promised the Captain she would be at the races. She wanted to see the sport, but wanted to see the Captain more. He was her senior some twenty years. He had retired from the merchant service for a rest, was possessed of some means, and was regarded as a well-bred man of the world; a bachelor of pleasing address, capable of making himself exceedingly popular with ladies. He was of robust figure, ruddy

face, inclined to be stout. Quite in contrast with delicate, youthful Ralph. In every way Beatrice's ideal of a man. His seniority was in his favor in her eyes. Like most young women she delighted contemplating men her elders. Mature sense, heroic mould, wisdom, composure, and substantial vigor affect women like Beatrice, and form the highest possible recommendations.

With one eye on the porch, the other down the road, she revelled in conflicting feelings. She did not like Governor Chandler; perhaps because he did not strive to make her like him. She had a dread of him; felt his gaze too keenly; stood in awe of his brilliant mentality. How different her mother in this regard? She saw her lean a white arm on the Governor's chair and beam into his face. Mrs. Meserve was certainly a most facinating woman. All her youth had promised, her maturity realized. She was superbly formed; suggestion of advancing years enhancing her charms. Her mother's devotion to the Governor, while Beatrice tried to excuse it on account of gratitude, displeased the haughty, head-strong girl.

From across the river Beatrice heard shouts and cheers attendant on the boat races; and soon carriages began coming, indicating the sport had terminated. She nodded pleasantly to passers, all of whom were summer neighbors, who made it a rule to seek

opportunity to salute some of the Governor's family. Her eyes were watching for the approach of the Captain, who she believed would pay her a call, or at least want to stop to inquire the cause of her absence? It was growing dark. Ralph had returned from his ride and taken a place on the side porch with his mandolin. The stables were closed for the night. All was stillness and peace, save the suppressed voices of the Governor and Mrs. Meserve in conversation.

Beatrice saw them arise and saunter into the house. She saw them stroll through the broad hall, while the butler came out, closed the shutters and replaced the piazza chairs. She saw them ascend the stairs, and she watched for a light to appear in her mother's boudoir. The gas flashed up in the Governor's room, and she saw two figures; but the boudoir remained in darkness. She felt a chill and hastened toward the house, her eyes fixed on the boudoir window. Hurrying in by the side door she quietly slipped up the back stairway. At the midlanding she halted. She heard muffled voices. They came from the Governor's room. No light in the boudoir. It's door stood open; but the Governor's door was closed.

With the greatest difficulty she propelled her limbs making ascent to her chamber. War of emotions impeded locomotion. Indignation and shame

tusseled for mastery. How long had this been going on? She tried to recall Ralph's demeanor. Was he cognizant? The father she had forgotten; who had been crowded from memory by the splendor of her new life, seemed again a reality. That gentle, kind, Christian papa! What would he think? What say, could he rise from the grave? Slowly, laboredly she climbed the great oaken stairway and entered her chamber. Her blood boiled. She could scarcely contain herself. Sleep was driven from her eyes. Her feelings were mingled disdain, contempt, hatred, violence. She realized as she removed her jewels why they were hers. She now knew whence they came. She knew the reason for her crowded wardrobe; the purchase price of her luxurious room. The thoughts made her sick. Doubtless Ralph knew? It was incredible that he, a man, would be ignorant of what she, a woman, had discovered. It made her hate him to think he could accept his father's shelter, spend his father's money, sit at his father's board! Her contempt was unspeakable! She felt a surging torrent of resentment when she contemplated the Governor's denunciation of the Captain, and the silence of her mother in support of his objections! Monstrous! Those two disapprove of him! They sit in judgment on her!

She sank by the window and watched the restless mastiffs stalking in the moonlight, sniffing the dewed turf. How was it she had been blind so long? Why had she not seen, not mistrusted? She felt bitter enough toward the Governor to kill him; and despised her mother sufficiently to expose her! She paused and contemplated. Was it unnatural? No. But to her it was heinous, base, depraved. She shivered imagining the secret of the locked chamber below stairs. She wanted to fling herself against it's door and utter screams of protest against the iniquity carried on under her eyes. How plainly now she understood the incessant attentiveness, which she had believed had a holier motive; their remaining at home and declining all diversions of the neighborhood; the Governor's extravagance; her mother's luxuriousness. Yet, how she had envied the gorgeous gems he imported, which became her mother's beauty so well? She understood her mother's solicitude for his comfort; her zeal for his luxury; her concern when he was ill. How plainly she saw everything. It aroused her wreakful anger. She must go away. She could never look them in the face again. Her father's spirit came in out of the night; glided up from the moonlit lawn, sad and tearful, asking where mother was? He did not rebuke her for being cold and unfeeling. He had a deeper sorrow, a greater grief. He laid

his hand on her shoulder forgivingly; imploring her to tell him where mother was? She could not answer. She tried to speak; to cry out; to weep; to relieve her wrought soul; but she was crushed, wounded, insulted, wronged! She felt her mother a long way removed, and going further. She could not imagine her below stairs, behind the massive locked door of that chamber. She went and listened. She could still hear voices behind the oaken casement. Her eyes started from their sockets as she peered into the blackness of the hall. She beat her clinched fists on the wall. She paced like a caged animal. Within her surged shame and wrath. She felt she could perpetrate any crime. She had never felt anything like it before. She was transformed into a fiend. She uttered oaths. Execrations fell from her lips so naturally she liked their sound. She repeated She hissed them into the blackness of the hall. How appropriate! How befitting! What! Apply them to her mother? Were they not true? Were they not deserved? Then temptation came on her to do something vile, hideous. She laughed at thought of it. Blood had no terror. She was a woman. Women never pale at sight of blood. Nature brands woman with it; writes health, buoyancy, hope, courage, affection, passion, in blood. Her eye is used to it. She can contemplate it without pang. Beatrice knew her strongest passion.

She struggled against it, fought it, mastered it for virtue's sake. She had felt it an inheritance. Tonight she *knew* it was. She had proof.

Why was Beatrice mindless of her mother's sin? Why so unfeeling at her vice? Why so cruel over her depravity? She felt the consciousness that from her mother she had inherited a brand! She felt something telling her there was in her being an unavenged wrong! Something unforgiving was permeating her veins, crying for vengeance! What was it? There are thousands feel this dragon within them; hear its growl; feel its bite; bleed and ache and get faint. They would vomit forth their tormentor! Sometimes it is cancer; sometimes ulcer; sometimes insanity; sometimes paralysis; sometimes blindness; then again it is ungovernable temper; viciousness; strong appetite; wicked impulses; sensuality. The dragon was in Beatrice, ineffaceable, life-long, damning! She felt it gnawing, prompting her to violence! To her mother? Nothing else would satisfy the dragon. It pointed its claw with imperious command. It told her to do so-andso for it's sake. It was a clamoring thing. lain dormant and silent since her babyhood. Occasionally it had made her restless in her sleep, waking with a headache, languid, giddy, causing her blurred sight and frightful pains. Now she knew it was this dragon and she felt it crying for some awful

wrong which had been done it. By her mother? It seemed to speak but she could not understand. Its words were like itself, unfinished. It talked of being her "elder brother." Then it plunged, writhed, tore her until she fell sobbing on the bed in what people call hysterics. In day time they would have said Governor Chandler's adopted daughter was having a fit. But it was this dragon that had been bedeviled by its mother and her mother when Doctor Bird was present; when he reasoned long and logically with her father. Alas, Doctor and father both dead! The dragon, though, wouldn't die! Her mother had made up her mind to kill it when she went to Armita with the announcement of its conception. Armita, poor, weak, dying, wanting to say something to please her pastor, congratulated him; and he was dazed and couldn't understand and went over onto the Common, and watched the nurses trundling baby carriages, and gave pennies to the boys by the gate because they had been babies. Then he went home to wonder. The day of Armita's funeral his wonder changed to gall, when he came home and found his wife prostrate. It was the struggle she made with the dragon! It fought! It would have been a brother to Beatrice; but became her tormentor, her blight, her curse! And because she couldn't be its instrument to punish their mother it threw her into spasms, hysteria, fits!

They heard her scream and ran to see what was the matter—the Governor, her mother, Ralph, the servants. They thought she was being murdered. She shrieked and became uncontrollable when her mother approached.

"Go away! Go away! He'll kill you! I can't hold him! He'll kill you! He's—he's—your—my—oh—oh—oh—oh—OH—OH—OH—A-h-h-h-h!!!"

She was quiet when the doctor came; but she had a fever for days and was confined to her room for

weeks.



PART FOUR.

THE WAR OF VENGENCE.

We are five years from the night Beatrice had her attack of hysteria; and we glide over those five years because they are simply stepping stones to a point of vitality. Not very many changes have occurred, strange to say; for five years often do much in human life; always something.

Ralph has been over the world; has become his father's partner; has married; resides in the old home on Boylston street. The Governor—they still call him, although he hasn't held office in more than ten years, —is sixty, gouty, irritable, richer than ever, attends to business but little, resides in the luxurious castle-like estate on Blue Hill avenue.

Beatrice is missing.

No one knows where she is; if living, or dead. She has gone, disappeared; past out of her former life; has never been sought, never asked for, never mourned. She went voluntarily, indignantly, after a furious interview in the boudoir at Chelmsford;

and when the Governor came home from Boston one night, he didn't ask for her; her mother didn't mention her departure; her name was never spoken afterward. There was an intuitive sensibility of propitious kindliness in silence possessing both her mother and the Governor. Not to ask questions is the greatest kindness to some people. It shows you have respect for them whether they merit it or not. It is polite as well as political. Answers cost, sometimes, and are made more grudgingly than jewels, kisses, or caresses. It is impossible, too, for answers to always be given; as impossible as to give one the foot they admire, or the eye, or the hand, or the enamel bosom. The asking of questions implies a desire to know. There are some things we don't want to know. We are happiest in surmises; careless if they be accurate. The disappearance of Beatrice had no effect. It was like the mist which lifted from the lawn the morning she went away; was not missed. Being unmentioned was forgotten. Only an expression of settled severity on Mrs. Meserve's face indicated what took place behind the oaken panels of the boudoir that mistmantled morning. The trap with the bred cobs had taken the Governor and Ralph to the station. Beatrice arose, contrary to the doctor's injunction, and sought her mother. Her tremulous, weak hand closed the door, and her fragile fingers turned

the key in the lock. Two hours later it was snapped open by Mrs. Meserve, who, with tears gushing from her eyes, angry, shameful, grievous tears, dashed from the room, hurried into the Governor's chamber, and flung herself on the bed and sobbed. Shortly afterward the slender figure of Beatrice, calm, icy, pallid of feature, darkly determined of eye, with lips compressed, and quick respiration of exhaustion, slowly emerged and retired to her own room, to be driven to the depot an hour later behind the same cobs, in the same trap. The train came along; her baggage was put aboard.

That was the end of it.

When the Governor and Ralph returned in the evening, Mrs. Meserve was awaiting them on the porch, sweet and serene as ever.

That is about the purport of these five years. But now we take up the thread and spin it minutely again.

* * * * * *

The portly old magnate slouched himself down in his easy chair beneath the prismatic chandaliers, rumpled his expansive shirt front, creased his rich dress coat. He had a business air about him as he touched the button and commanded the servant:

"Tell Mrs. Meserve I wish to see her."

When the door opened a radiance of mature loveliness entered, but there was no buoyancy in her manner, no eagerness in her step, no zeal in her response. The woman of fifty did the bidding of the man of sixty with perfunctory readiness. Her face was flushed with color of extravagant living; seamed with lines of luxurious languor; haughty with impatient unhappiness. The golden hair was white; the brilliant eyes dull; the shapely mouth pouted.

"Ah, you're here! Well, about the provisions? You must vacate tomorrow morning! I close up the house! What sum have you determined upon? Mark you, now, I want this to be final. No after claps, no future appeals, no bothering me later. Whatever we agree upon now is ultimate. What shall it be?"

A shade of bitterness settled upon the aristocratic countenance of the woman. What interest was it to her if the old man brought a young bride to preside over his palace? Her reign had passed. Her crown was called for. A few words broke her sceptre. She must go forth the deposed regent of a rich man's—purse. How imperiously the old Governor (the farmer's example to his son of an honorable and successful life) pronounced the conditions? How rejoiced he was he had not yielded to impulse a few years previously and undertaken vows he could not thus rudely and unequivocally unloose? He was dictator. There was no gainsaying his law. Merely filling in a check, a few words of thanks for ser-

vices rendered, and he and this passe woman would part forever. Would he care what became of her? Assuredly not. Would she miss him? Never! The partnership was dissolved. By limitation? As well call it that as anything. It was over, past, done, ended, anything you choose to call it. No sadness; no sighs; no tears; no farewells. It had been boding, in the air, generating, inevitable. They were too old to have any sentiment about it. In a month the neighbors would forget.

The Governor was a great man!

- "Well, what do you say?"
- "A hundred thousand was what I said."
- "And I objected! It's too much!"
- "I can't suit you, it seems. That's the consideration. I shall not retract!"

Cold, deliberate, unfeeling as a trade in horses. They looked into each others faces with the same eyes of twenty-five years before; but they burned no longer with ardor; pleaded no more with sympathy; they leered, were cruel, gloated over this conscience-less transaction.

"You are extortionate! Why should I meet you on such an extravagant basis? You've no claim on me!"

She looked at him mutely. What could she say? She had no claim on him. There were jewels hanging from her ears, encircling her throat, about her

wrists; and an hour before, when the throng of guests departed, many remarked the splendor of her attire and the wealth of her gems; and there were nods of head, and winks and smiles; but no one dared say a word, for it was Governor Chandler! Croesus! Magnate! Monopolist! Oh, no! woman had no claim upon the great man! That claim had been liquidated; paid in coin; in jewels; in shelter; in splendor; in servants; in carriages; in unlimited credit; in permission to be fond of the old man and to pander to his whims; and payment had also been made by driving a daughter out into the world, cursing her mother! And she had allowed it to go undenied. But the sacrifice of a daughter, what was that? The humilation of being liberated at a price, what was that?

Bah!

Write her the check, old man, and have done with it! Let her keep the thousands of dollars worth of jewels; what do you care?

His half palsied hand tore a check from the book. The pen was dipped in ink. The words and figures were placed on the strip of parchment. The signature, famous throughout the state, was appended. It was the same signature made to the marriage register with Armita Holbrook; the same signature made to the burial certificate when that wife was laid away; the same signature put to the baptismal

register in Burr street church when little Ralph was given a name before the world. It is more tremulous, less regular; but tomorrow it will again appear on a marriage register, bonding the life of a fair flower of womanhood, who knew naught of this—or, well, maybe she had heard; but what cared she what has been? Mrs. Governor Chandler! That's musical enough. Perhaps the "old woman" was his housekeeper; she may have been his mistress? He got her out of the way. That's enough.

"There!"

The palsied hand pushed the check across the table. Her hand, heavy with sparkling gems, picked it up, scanned it carefully, regarded it approvingly; there was a rustle of silk, a swish of skirts, a closing door, and Vezia Meserve and Ralph Chandler were henceforth to be as much strangers as if they had never met. The morrow would see the widow, the mother of a lost child, the consort of a great man—What? Where?

The apoplectic old Governor snapped the cigar ashes from his shirt bosom, put away his check book, grunted and hobbled out into the dining room, where the butler had toddy piping hot. He sat before the crackling logs, his mind filled with the grand church ceremony to take place at high noon. The orange blossoms were to be on the firm, hard bosom of a budding woman; the bells would ring;

paid voices would make melody; paid fingers would touch responding keys; paid pipers would play merrily the wedding symphonies; for "the grand old man" of the state was to be married! He sipped his toddy, grunted, chuckled, mussed his coat tails, and shook cigar ashes on his linen bosom, and was happy and hopeful, and had a clear conscience, for everything was "all right." He dropped asleep. The clock ticked over the threshold of another day, and it was most dawn when the stupefied old autocrat summoned his valet and was put to bed; to act as bridegroom in a few hours at the grandest wedding Boston had seen in years.

* * * * * * *

After breakfast a stout, elderly woman moved down the gravel path toward the avenue to ride into town. No one attended her, no one helped her aboard the car. She was no longer of consequence; had lost caste even with the servants. The check in her pocket will pay the toll through a few years of existence; will prop the chin of shame a little, and make her dignified, and enable her to be one of life's respectables; will give her a comfortable habitation; rich food to eat; elegant clothes to wear; a servant, and a trap of some kind. But old acquaintances will never speak of her as "Rev. Mr. Meserve's widow." She will be "the woman who used to live with old Governor

Chandler." It was known the minister died penniless; known she was earning her living when he married her; known she made her home with the Governor for years; known she was supplanted by the old man's newer darling, who sold herself for luxury of being a rich man's wife. One was wife to him as much as the other. Each marketed herself. The elder was pensioned. The younger was wedded because she could not be possessed otherwise. Merely a matter of craft. From Boston's society the name of Meserve was dropped. Some recalled there was such a pastor at Burr street church; such a family used to live on Clarendon street; a stately woman with beautiful golden hair used to promenade the Public Garden with a sweet-faced girl. No Mrs. Falling, no Doctor Bird, nobody to keep memory alive. There was a younger generation in the pews of Burr street; a younger generation occupying Clarendon street residences; a younger generation living for itself. Ralph Chandler, Jr., never permitted her name to be mentioned in his home; and the only thing he had against his father was something he never talked about.

So the elderly woman with the handsome face and the elegant form rode into town and went to her bankers. She chose her flat and set about making life endurable. When she went on the street and met people she knew, they glanced at her a moment,

then looked away. Happily the great mass knew naught; who she was, what she'd been, where she lived? They cared less. The days dawned and died; contained nothing for her, brought her nothing. promised nothing. She occasionally saw the rich equipage of the old Governor roll by; saw his corpulent figure against the cushions; and saw beside him a being of radiant youth and sweetness. It didn't cause her a pang. The next instant she was attracted by a showy window and forgot all about it. She went across the Common sometimes; but never thought of the cripple. She passed through Bedford street; but never thought of Mrs. Falling, or of the high school boys. She strolled onto Beacon hill; but never thought of the man with the thoroughbred dog. She passed the house where she and Armita used to board; but never wanted to see their old room. She changed entirely; completely; became another being; was re-sexed; a woman, but not the woman. This was not the work of poverty, neglect, disease, nor misfortune. It was not through any caprice of Time. She no longer contemplated the old home down in Albemarle. Years ago, when she first lost her grip on its memory, she loosened her hold on womanhood. Her decline began when she forgot the old manor in the wooded hills of Virginia. For, however humble home may be, it is ever home,

and the shelter of virtue, even though that shelter be but the eaves of memory. She long since ceased to care if her stepmother had concluded the population of the Old Dominion. She had a dreadful fright one day. We remember it. It was the day of Armita's It was the fright of a discovered criminal. It was remorse for the greatest crime in the world. She never forgot that. She lay there on the floor when her husband came in and found her. Good man! He sent for the doctor, who saved her life. For what? That she should become an outcast? That she bear a child in whose veins ran taint of her crime; who was conceived where another life had been begun and annihiltated by her hand? That she should disgrace womanhood, wifehood, motherhood? That she should drive this only child out into the world because that child, born of impurity, of crime, of murder, of deceit, because that child could not endure her depravity? It was a human mistake her life was saved by Doctor Bird. He and her husband thought they were doing what was best; but it was a mistake. And Beatrice was a mistake. Everything that came after was a mistake. God held the funnel of calamity over her, and it snowed her head; lined her face; and people saw the dregs and avoided her. Man's money couldn't help her. The old Governor's gift did her no good.

She had no friends; no homes opened to her; no one would speak to her except those who were paid to, and those who speak to everybody.

We might as well have done with her. Her life line henceforth ran direct, unswerving, without incident. Everything was down grade. She was ignored by others, then by herself. She despised herself because despised of others. She didn't become common; for a hundred thousand dollars will keep any woman from becoming common. But it won't lift her, nor improve her, nor prop her; nor open a door, a heart, nor a lip. Now and again some man came into her life; some man beneath her; a vulture; a leech. He lived off her for a time; they quarreled; separated; and another took his place. But they were all after her money; none after herself. Ah, there's where life cuts it's deepest lines; when the world cares nothing for us for ourselves; when we have acquaintances, but no friend; houses, but no home.

A lawyer drew up a paper for her; her will. She was ailing, depressed, disheartened. All her investments she bequeathed to the founding of a home for foundlings. For a few months she tried travel, and mentioned now and again a daughter she would like to find.

A man walking along the bank of Charles River one evening at twilight saw a woman spring over the bridge.

The Home for Abandoned Children has been a flourishing, beneficial institution.



PART FIVE.

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

Bang! Bang!

Two explosions of a weapon rang from a tenement block. Then all was still. It was late. No one was abroad. After some time the front door opened and a man appeared. He disappeared down the street hurriedly. Soon after another man skulked out the back way and made off. In the middle room of the top flat lay a woman, her dirty cotton shift bedraggled with her gore. Some wounds stop discharging by clodding. Close onto noon a woman stamped noisily into the top flat, a pitcher of beer in her hand. She went singing through the rooms, but when she came to the middle room she shrieked, set down her pitcher, grabbed up the woman in the dirty, bloody shift, laid her on the tumble bed, and ran for a doctor. The physician sent the woman to the hospital. The police heard of the case and investigated. The woman had been shot by her husband, or lover, nobody knew which he was. Why? Probably because he found somebody in his rooms who didn't belong there. The woman had nothing to say. What was elicited came voluntarily from other tenants, prominent among them the woman who bore the pitcher of beer, and discovered the victim. With all the police and hospital surgeons could find, nothing of a criminating character could be ascertained. After a few days the woman was discharged as convalescent. As soon as she was out of sight of the hospital she went into a drug store, asked for pen and paper, wrote a note, called a messenger boy, and then repaired to the back room of a saloon and awaited a response. It was not long coming. A man entered, swaggering in his manner, flashily dressed, rough in speech.

"Well, you're out, are yer? Hell of a mess you came near getting me into! What'cher goin' ter do?"

[&]quot;Going back home."

[&]quot;There ain't no home!"

[&]quot;What! You've-"

[&]quot;Yes, certainly! What'cher take me fer? How'd I know what chew'd do? Case o'blow I tuk it? S'pose you'd squealed? A honey jay I'd been to be keepin' house like a gilly, wouldn't I? Oh, no! I cleaned everything out! Sold every stick!"

[&]quot;And the money?"

Blowed! What'cher spec'? Think I banked it?"

The woman dropped her head on the table and sobbed. The thug stood over her, a smile of demonical leer on his face. When she grew calmer, wiping her eyes with her old fur jacket sleeve, he caught hold of the drops in her ears.

"Say, what's the matter wid shovin' these? They're good for a couple o'hundred."

She drew away from him.

"No! Never these!"

She shivered, hung her head, and put her hands up to protect the jewels from his touch.

"Why not?" drawled the vagrant. "Whot's them? Nothin' but di'mon's! I didn't gin 'em ter yer! Yer won't be doin' me no dirt ter hawk 'em! Come now, give 'em ter me, an' I'll be back here'n a jiffy wid der mon?"

"No! No!" She drew away from him further, still covering her ears.

"Well, go ter ——!" and he struck her a blow with his open hand across the side of her head. Then he walked out to the bar and called for a drink.

"Here's ter yer!" draining his glass.

Then he swaggered out of the place.

The woman with two pistol bullets under her skin, left there because the doctors thought best not to probe, looked after the man who put them there. Tears stood in her eyes. Did she love him? Was it love prompted her to write the note and send for

him? Did she want to caress the hand lifted to take her life? Was she sorry for anything? No. This woman loved nobody. She had loved; and those two precious stones glistening in her ears were all that remained of that love. They were the gift of the man she loved. He had abandoned her; deserted her to her fate; tired of her; worn his patience out condoning her faults; wearied of hearing her falsehoods. One by one, when left alone, she parted with his gifts until only the ear drops remained. They were his first present. Not the most valuable. The first, hence most precious. She had been hungry and cold, and had walked the streets penniless, feeling them grating against her breasts where she had them hid; but unwilling they should appease her hunger. She had stopped under twinkling street lights and dragged them through the rags which protected her, held them in her hands, stared at their brilliant light, kissed them frantically. They represented love, indulgence, kindness she had abused; devotion she had ignored; and they were all that remained of luxury and a man's mad passion. She kept them, burning lights of her despoiled womanhood.

She sat in that dingy back room, her elbows resting on the blackened, dirty table, her eyes fixed on the door through which the brute had disappeared. Her hands still covered her ears, concealing the

yes, they'd bring that. And she penniless, everything sold, the proceeds squandered. Where should she go? Where find shelter? He? Bah! He, nothing! He was broke, as usual. The drink he had just taken was unpaid for. She must pay it. How? She unfastened a little pin at her throat, held it in her hand and looked at it. Her mind went back many years. She was a little girl again, at home with papa and mama. Papa was such a good man; one everybody loved. So kind, so gentle, so tender; and mama, so beautiful, so admired. That little pin was one of her first childish ornaments, inseparably associated with memories of papa and —it was all she had except the gems.

"Jim," she called to the barkeeper. What'll you give me for this?"

"What is it?" he asked, from behind the bar, rubbing glasses.

"It's a gold pin." And she choked a little saying it, for dead and buried memories.

"A breast pin, eh?"

" Yes."

"What'd I want with it?"

She arose and walked out to the bar and leaned wearily on the stained rail.

"But I want a little money, Jim?"

"What fer? Ain't yer got Bill to take care o'yer?"

"Him!" she choked forth. "Take care o'me? I'm just from the hospital, Jim, and I've two pistol shots in me this minute that he fired. He's got nothing. You know that. Did you ever know him to have anything I didn't give him, or get for him?"

"What'd yer stay with him for? You sent for him?"

"What else was I to do? He's got the keys to our rooms, and he's gone and pawned everything I had in the world except what I've got on."

"Well, you've no business to be broke and them di'monds in your ears. Sell 'em! What business has the likes o' you with di'monds? You're starving and want me to buy that 'air little breast pin from you. I don't want it. I'll buy them stones, though. I'll give you a hundred for 'em?"

"Won't you buy the pin, Jim?"

" No."

"How much does Bill owe?"

"Ten cents. He jest got a drink."

"Take the pin for it."

And she tossed it on the sloppy bar.

"It's good for another drink," said Jim, examining the simple bar of gold. "Have one?"

"No. If Bill comes back say I paid for another drink for him."

She huddled the worn, fur jacket about her and walked out into the gathering, gloomy, winter night. She turned from Tremont street into Chapman and hurried aimlessly along above the din of the trains, rumbling, ringing, steaming through the tunnel. She longed to get as far away, and as rapidly, from the sacrilege she had perpetrated parting with the pin. She was hungry and faint. Walking along the deserted pavement she was forced to pick her way, because little puddles of snow water settled in the uneven bricks, and her shoes were worn through. It was not cold, but muggy and foggy. She kept peering ahead; she might catch a glimpse of Bill. It made her warm to walk fast, and she threw back the lapels of the old fur jacket. At the corner of Shawmut avenue she halted. The barricaded window of a pawn shop caught her eye. Up went her hands to her ears and she plucked the gems and pushed them into the buttonless opening of her dress, onto her shallow, shrivelled breasts. They were safe. Still she looked determinedly at the pawn shop, and finally crossed and entered.

"How much on this jacket?" she asked.

The broker examined the worn, moth-eaten wrap. "A dollar."

She slipped out of it, flung it on the counter, grabbed up the bill, and walked out. Down Shawmut avenue until she reached Pleasant street; thence

into a dingy dive, taking a seat at a rickety table covered with oil cloth, called for hot sausage, bread and coffee. Hardly had the man started to fill the order when she exclaimed:

"Stop! I've forgotten my money!"

Out she darted into the street, fumbling in the pocket of her dress for the note she received for the jacket. She found the hole. A ghastly, hungry grin twitched her mouth as she walked away; slipping her hand into her bosom to be sure the gems were safe. Up Pleasant street to Shawmut avenue again. Bill's neighborhood. She might meet him. Few people were in sight. Not a mouthful had she eaten all day. The dampness made her wounds pain acutely. She stepped into a doorway to put the gems in a safer place; for she determined to eat at all hazards. People will imperil their immortal souls for food. She picked the gems out of her bosom, examined them eagerly, lifted her skirts, and thrust them into her stocking. Then she resumed her walk. Her notice of passers was more eager. Before she reached Chapman street she passed a man standing on the curb. The words rose to her lips to ask him for a dime to get something to eat; but she thought of the earrings and couldn't. He spoke to her. She stopped and talked. He asked her to take a drink with him? She knew what that meant, and she went.

It was past midnight when she was again alone on the street; still hungry, more hungry. She went into the Pleasant street den, sat at a table, called for hot sausage, bread, coffee.

"Found your money, eh?" grinned the man, a slovenly, shambling fellow.

"Oh, yes," she replied, trying to smile and clutching a bank note. She brooded over the common thing she had done. She called herself names under her breath. Could it be possible? If she hadn't been driven to it! She ate her greasy meal, gulped the coffee, paid the check, and was once more on the street.

She slowly turned into Shawmut avenue and sauntered up as far as the railroad bridge. The night air was cool and she clutched the buttonless front of her dress over the otherwise unprotected bosom. She felt utter degradation; disgraced beyond previous sinfulness. The silver change clutched nervously in the numb fingers seemed price of irrevocable ruin. She knew she was dirty, ragged, and both looked and acted what she was, a—but until tonight, until driven by hunger, never so low, so wanton! Homeless, ill-clad, sick and hopeless, how could she help it? Her wounds ached. Then she thought of Bill. Why did he shoot her? Why not have waited and seen? She had done no wrong; had not been unfaithful to him.

He should have waited and seen who was in the room with her. She hung over the rail of the bridge and thought it all over. Then she started up, muttering:

"I'll see if I can find him."

She turned into Chapman street, was soon at the corner of Tremont, and quickly reached the back door of the saloon where she met him in the afternoon. Carefully pushing the door open she entered. The back room was vacant. Bill leaned heavily on the bar talking to Jim.

"So she gin it ter ye, did she?"

"O'course she did. An' there's another drink here for you, Bill. Hev it?"

"No. I'm goin' ter git them di'mon's. Them's what I wants."

The men heard the click of the back door and turned. Jim had the little gold pin in his necktie.

Bill fixed his drunken eyes on the woman and staggered forward.

"So you're back, be yer! Goin't'set 'em up? Tha's right! Di'mon's gone, eh? Pawn'd 'em, eh? Zhacket, too, eh? That's b's'ness! No right ter have di'mon's an' me starvin' an' no home! Whar'z 'money?"

She put the change from her supper in his hand. He was too stupid to realize its insignificance. "Goo'nuf! See thet, Jim? Comes like a goo'un an' gives me whot she gets fer them di'mon's! Le's hev sunthun, Jim."

The men drank at the bar, she sitting in the back room, watching them. They didn't invite her. The drink completed Bill's oblivion, and he reeled around unable to talk. She stepped into the bar, seized him by the arm and led him out the back door. He, the man who shot her! The man who had just taken from her the money she had disgraced herself to buy food with! The man who sold her out while she lay in the hospital writhing with his wounds!

Women are strange!

She placed her arm about him, steadied him down the street across Washington street, Harrison avenue, to Albany street, where a lumber yard gate stood open. She guided him inside. He slumped onto a pile of plank. She lay down beside him. She felt in her stocking for the earrings. They were there. She was content, and went to sleep.

She was relieved when, at daybreak, a patrolman rudely grabbed her up and hurried her off to the police station.

Bill, with his usual fortune, escaped.

Stiff, sore, and ill, she waited in a cell for the van to take her to court. A mess of something in a tin

pot, a hunk of bread, breakfast. Repeatedly she plunged her hand into her stocking. They were safe.

"Thirty days, House of Industry."

No defense; no protest. A nod of her head, a scratch of the judicial pen, into the van, down to the wharf, aboard the steamer.

The instant she entered the cage on the boat her eye fell on a dwarf huddled up in the corner. Their eyes met. They were total strangers; but they could not remove their eyes from each other. Both ragged, bedraggled, besotted, they looked into each other's face lovingly. He was repulsive, vicious, cruel. Yet she was as fascinated as one in her half-starved, wounded, sore, filthy condition could be.

In an hour they reached Deer Island and prison life.

While being searched; even when they took the gems from her, asking where she stole them? when the rough woman grabbed her and pushed her into the bath; when they put the coarse prison garment on her and sent her to the laundry to work; all the time she glanced about, peering slyly, for the face of the dwarf. At night as she lay on the hard bed staring up to the high whitewashed ceiling, she pictured the hard, cruel face. The instant she awoke it was before her; and all day long, and for the thirty days she remained, Improvement of mind

and body, a clarifying of besotted being, didn't drive away the face. As she thought upon it she mentally fondled it, imagined kisses for it in her sleep. It charmed her, eased her, soothed her.

They told her to get ready for liberation. They gave her back the gems. They had no right to keep them, and no clue to her possession. She went down to the landing to take the boat back to the city. She was free. A month prisoner. It had sobered her, cleaned and purified her. They had washed her dress; mended her undergarments; patched her shoes; sewed strings to her bonnet. Her skin felt smooth; her head felt clear; her eyes were brighter; her face less bloated; her limbs didn't tremble. She was free again! While sitting in the cage on the landing awaiting the boat the door opened and the dwarf shambled in. He, too, was cleaner, brighter, smoother-looking; but hideous to all but her. She started. He walked over to her.

"We go back together, as we came?" he said. She could hardly speak. She wanted to answer. It thrilled her for him to speak to her. His voice sounded familiar. She had heard it before. She looked in his face. His dark, rolling eyes were peering up at her from beneath shaggy brows.

[&]quot;Yes," she managed to reply.

Then they looked at one another and kept looking. A feeling of happiness came over to her, something she had not known, a new happiness. When the boat came in and the keeper opened the cage door for the liberated prisoners to go down the gang plank, the dwarf walked beside her; took hold of her arm. It thrilled her to faintness for him to touch her. Quivers of joy like fever shivers ran over her. They sat side by side on the lower deck, away from the other libertees.

"The sea breeze makes one hungry," he remarked. She felt hungry immediately.

"Yes," she replied.

He liked her voice and wheeled around facing her. Their eyes met, and she felt something permeate her being coming from him like a marrow of force.

"You're going home?" he asked.

"I have no home," she replied.

She said this quickly.

"No home," he muttered.

She watched him. He rolled his dark eyes up to her's, and a smile of ghoulish fantasy overspread his face. She smiled back at him. She couldn't help it. Then he put his hand on her's, and they sat that way until they went ashore. He offered his arm. She took it. The officers on the wharf

laughed; but they heeded not. They walked up from the dock, along deserted Atlantic avenue, and up into Federal street.

They talked some.

"I'm a tailor," he said. "I take a little too much sometimes. You understand?"

Yes, she understood. She did also. But how grand she felt with her wrist resting on his skinny arm, and his shuffling steps, two to one of her's. She looked down upon him every minute. He was so tiny, barely to her elbow. She asked questions to hear him talk. His voice was harsh, but like vestal bells to her.

"You can come and stay with me, if you don't mind?"

She smiled and squeezed his arm a little. It pleased him. He broke his face up into jagged fragments and chuckled.

They hurried on.

"I've never had a girl," he went on, "I'm too homely for any one to like me."

He hop-scotched to keep up with her. She smiled into his ugly face, and clutched his arm more tightly. They were very happy. He knew why he was happy; but she didn't. She was controlled. Something was impelling her to keep close to this creature. He wasn't a man; nor a boy; but a creature. He was a God in her eyes. She couldn't tell why.

"In here!" he exclaimed.

They dodged into an alley, into a low door, mounted three flights of steps.

"Wait here. I'll get my key."

Off he pattered in the dark. She heard his footsteps traversing a long corridor. Soon he came back, thrust a key in the lock, asked her in. He struck a match, lighted a lamp. They were in a large, airy room. A tailor's workshop and bedroom combined. It was moderately clean. The bench had unfinished work on it. The bed was made up. Empty bottles stood around. A pipe and some cut tobacco. Dirty dishes.

He bustled around straightening things out; but he was too happy and too nervous to do anything well.

"Let me help you?" she said, and went to work putting things to rights.

"If you'll build a fire I'll go out and get something to eat," he said.

Off he went, taking a pitcher with him. She knew that was for beer. Her head throbbed. She was very happy. Something in her soul which had been tormenting her for years seemed gone. She felt lighter, brighter, happier. She built the fire. She sat down to watch it burn. The warmth made her sleepy. She stuck her wet feet up to the heat. She felt hate and revenge burn-

ing off the soles. She thought of Bill and curled her lip in scorn. He was out of her life; the dwarf was in it. And the dwarf filled it. He seemed in her, over her, about her; gorging her heart and mind; awakening latent sweetness; arousing kindliness long dulled and smothered. She longed for him to come back; missing him for the few minutes. She smoothed out her patched dress skirt to look as neat as she could. She stood before the mirror and with the broken comb smoothed back her hair. She smiled and looked around the room, planning what she would do next day fixing it up and making it prettier.

The door opened and the dwarf scurried in, laden with edibles and toting the pitcher over-running with beer foam.

"My credit's good!" he exclaimed. "Ain't that lucky? We'll have plenty, though, as soon as I get to work. There's all that to be finished," pointing to the bench "Maybe you could help me?"

He looked up into her face and grinned, and he seemed so precious she caught his face in her hands and kissed it. This appeared to frenzy him. He sprang up and clasped her around the neck and dragged her into a chair beside him, and fondled and caressed her.

They partook of their meal, drank the beer, enjoying it royally. Their tongues ran ceaselessly. They

talked of their life on the island and laughed over the peculiarities of the officers and matrons. They made sport of such a little thing as being in prison a month.

"You must have been a remarkably pretty woman?" he said, gazing admiringly into her face. "I fell in love with you on the boat going down, and I ain't thought of anything else but you since I've been there."

"It was just the same with me," she replied.

They wiped the beer off their lips and kissed.

"We'll get along nicely together, I know," he continued. "We won't go out except together. We won't drink anything unless we drink together. Then we won't get into mischief."

He fixed his eyes upon her with a look which gave him the expression of a grieved child. A peculiar thrill went through her. She thought it might be the effect of the light. She held her hand in front of it. No, he looked at her the same way. She had seen that expression before. It was the first suspicion of the kind that came to her. She knew she'd seen that look before.

- "You've had some fellow?" he asked.
- "Oh, yes," she replied, laughing.
- "How do I know you won't go back to him when you get on your feet?"

He looked more grieved and worried. The resemblance to something she had seen was more striking.

"Can't you trust me?" she asked.

She put her arm about his hump and kissed him.

"I'm going to trust you 'cause I want a girl, and I love you. I can't help trusting people I like. But it ain't safe to trust good looking women; at least, not for broken-back men to trust their pretty girls. Is it?"

She laughed and hugged him because she enjoyed petting him. He seemed a toy, a plaything, a cuteness that satisfied her.

"I shan't make you jealous," she said.

But I am jealous," he broke in. "I'm always jealous. I've been so since I was a child. I was so abused, and belittled, and kept under that I can't help being jealous. Now I've got you, and you and I are going to live together, how can I help wondering if you'll be willing to stick to a hunchback like me?"

"You've seen better days?" she hinted.

He looked up at her again with that rememberable childish gaze.

"I was born an aristocrat; but I was the black sheep. My brother was the favorite. He was handsome. My mother was another man's wife."

"Are you illegitimate?" she exclaimed.

"Pretty near. I've got most too much to put up with to be called that, but you come pretty near being right. My mother was a war widow; my father a bachelor and a school teacher. My mother lived near the school and they got acquainted in that way. I've good blood in me on both sides. I've a brother. He's good looking, they liked him and he's well fixed."

He grew sad, and his face looked more familiar than ever. It was so downcast and solemn she couldn't help loving him.

He turned out the light.

She couldn't sleep. Something surged within her. It was joy and gladness: for she was happy. He loved her and went to sleep nestling to her like a .child, his arms about her, his kisses dying in slumber. How she longed to be thus loved! How it appeased her, calmed her, and made her happy! The blackness seemed fading from her life as a garment bleaches in the sun. She felt no longer degraded. This love was real, kind, ecstatic. hugged him while he slept. Backward her wideawake mind went. Where was the tormentor of her whole life? Where was that inward burning which never left her? Where the terrifying consciousness of something awful in herself? She went back to her life with Bill; its baseness, iniquity. went back to the last night they were together; the pawned jacket, the loss of the money, the sin to satisfy her hunger, Bill's brutality, the bed in the lumber yard.

She sprang up and dove into her stocking! Yes, the gems were all safe!

She lived over again the days with the man who gave them to her—her first lover; his kindness, tenderness, indulgence. She found a harborage with him when pursued by terrors at the most critical period of her life. He installed her a queen; encompassed her with luxury; decked her in fine raiment; bejeweled her; trusted her; believed in her. She deceived him; betrayed him; proved false. He deserted her.

Again she got up and drew from her stocking the glittering mementoes of her days of first, happiest sin. She tucked them away again and crept in closely beside the dwarf. As she felt his touch he seemed a part of her life prior to her first temptation, in her girlhood, in her childhood, in her infancy. He was the form, shape, size of her tormentor; of her sinwooer, of her curse. She recalled his possession of her when he came up from the smooth, moonlit lawn, where the restless dogs were stalking and sniffing. He came hand-in-hand with her dead father. He possessed her soul and called for vengeance for his own destroyed life. He declared: "I am thy elder brother!" She saw him bleed, and foam, and gnash

his teeth! She remembered how he brought to her knowledge of her mother's shame. How he dragged her dead father from his grave to behold their family dishonor! How her father wept; how he wept; how the angels wept; how her womanhood revolted and rebelled! She recalled his imp-like form as it danced about her head, jumped into her heart, tore at the tendrils of her soul, and told her the tale of mother's shame and told her he had brought father's spirit to bear witness to it! He came to her in the shape of a hideous dragon, scorching her soul, drying her blood, blighting her mind! She remembered the night of horror and the weeks of fever! How, when she arose from her bed she knew she was possessed of the spirit of immatured kindred, of the unripened fruit of her parents' wedlock. Her father knew, in his spirit life, all about it. She went into her mother's room and locked the door, and faced her with the greatest crime in the world!

But this creature beside her was flesh; real, natural, loving, fond, and made her peaceful and content. He had been with her in prison. They sympathized and love sprang up and blessed them.

By the time their child was born they had lived out of the gloom of Deer Island; out of debt; out of fear; out of jealousy; and were the happiest parents in Boston. They worked industriously. Tailoring was brisk; comfort surrounded them. Neither went

abroad without the other, except to deliver work; so it happened that one Sunday morning she took the baby and he a basket of lunch and they rode out to Mount Auburn Cemetery.

"I want to show you my mother's grave," he said, as they went through the magnificent gate. Along the smoothly gravelled walk they strolled, he toting the basket, she the baby. They passed a newly made mausoleum. She uttered a cry, swooned on the walk with the child in her arms.

"I shouldn't have let you come out today. You're not strong. We'll go home."

"No! No!" she exclaimed sitting up and staring at the chiselled stone in the huge shaft before her. She read the inscription:

SACRED

TO THE MEMORY OF

VEZIA NOURSE MESERVE,

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE IN THE 53RD

YEAR OF HER AGE.

HER ENDURING MEMORIAL IS THE "HOME FOR ABANDONED CHILDREN," FOUNDED, AUGUST— 18—.

THIS MONUMENT WAS ERECTED BY ADMIRERS
OF HER PHILANTHROPY.

"A good woman, no doubt," he said. "Come. Let's move on."

She clambered to her feet. She always obeyed.

They proceeded a little further, came to a small lot, ill kept, containing a grave with a small stone. The carving was cheap and rough. It read:

"SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF RUTH FALLING."

ERECTED BY HER SON.

"I put that up," he said. "Come, you'd best get home."

That was one of their Sundays.

They had many simple excursions, but never again visited Mount Auburn. She was wrapped up in her bright pretty baby, and more deeply in love with its hunch back papa. No man could be more tender, fond, sweet natured, indulgent. There was but one secret between them, and she wore that in the bottom of her shoe. The diamonds! She dared not show them; could not hide them; would not sell them. They were sacred.

How proud she was of her deformed man! It seemed the exactly suitable thing that they should love. When she had day dreams and dissected her soul she discovered where it was she had seen his upturned face, and the leer of his eyes from under the shaggy brows. She went out of herself, to some

walking along a park and met a nurse girl with a cripple and a larger boy who was handsome. But she didn't seem to be herself. She seemed to be her mother. The cripple had a face like her man's. She laughed at this, it was so absurd.

The baby grew, was shapely, handsome, bright. She was very proud of her. So was her papa, although not much bigger.

"I'll take the bundle around today," she said, "I want to get a dress on my way back."

So he did up the bundle of coats they'd been making, and she changed her clothes and went off with it. He remained at his work, baby playing on the floor. The child crawled under the bed and dragged out one of her mother's slippers she'd cast off to put on her shoes to go out. Something rolled out onto the floor. He, sitting cross-legged on the bench, saw it glitter. He sprang down and picked it up. It was the two earrings caught together by the spiral. He was furious, wild, crazed! All the jealousy of his nature was inflamed! He tore up and down the room until she came in.

"Here!" he shouted, dancing from the floor into a chair and out again. "These! Your lover! Who is he? Where did you get these? How came you by them? Diamonds! And we so

poor! Speak! Tell me! I'll kill you! I'll strangle the child! She's not mine! She's his! Who is he! His name! I'll shoot him! Speak! Damn you, speak!"

She sank into a chair, while he beat his little fists on her knees and shoulders. She hadn't strength to push him away.

For once she had forgotten them! The first time in her life she had overlooked them!

"They were given me," she replied when she recovered breath.

"I know! I know! By whom? Who is it? Quick! Tell me, or I'll kill the child!"

She snatched the infant from his fiendish grasp. Then she hissed in his ears—

"Shall I tell you, fool?"

"Yes, damn you, yes! Quick! Out with it."

"They were given to me by your brother, Captain Frank Falling!"

"M-y b-r-o-t-h-e-r F-r-a-n-k! Tis a—so—so—hell—you—he!"

He fell into a distorted, quivering, shapeless mass of passion!

She looked down at him!

She nearly dropped the child!

THE DRAGON! THE DRAGON! HE WAS THE DRAGON!

The same motions! The same writhings! The same contortions! The same noises! Just as she had seen the awful creature in her diseased mind all the weeks she lay in fever! He frothed at the mouth! He yelled! He screeched! He cursed! He crawled like a worm! He leaped like a frog! He snarled like a dog! He hissed like a serpent!

She picked up the gems where he had flung them. She clasped her child to her breast. She started for the door. With the agility of a hound he sprang after her! He fastened his teeth in her arm! She shook him off! He fell to the floor! She kicked him with all her strength! Blood spurted all over his face!

She scrambled down the stairs, rushed out of the alley, and was gone.

With her pretty child she went to live in an over-flowing block of rickety tenements. Nobody knew her name, nor how she lived. But she did live, and cared for the child, and sent her to school, and dressed her well. For herself, she was always besotted with liquor, coarse, ugly, lazy. She staid out late nights, slept late mornings; but she paid her rent, and the child was wholesome and well fed. The woman was a mystery. She was quick to quarrel; would fight in a second; hated everybody. The neighbors didn't like her, but they loved the sweet dainty child.

Men hung around her rooms when the child was at school.

One afternoon when school was over, her child in a clean pinafore was playing with other children in a marsh back of the row. Suddenly a huge dog appeared and chased the children, overtaking the one with the clean pinafore. The brute pounced upon her, bore her to the ground, tore her frightfully. The other children screamed, ran into the houses, calling for their mothers. The women in the block ran out, but the sight stayed them, drove them back; and the dog's gnawing was uninterrupted until the child was dead. Then the dog ran away. mother of the child came from her rooms followed by a man, who hurried off. She hastened onto the marsh, her sleeves rolled above her discolored, hairy arms, her dress front open, her stockings dragging, no shoes, her skirts torn and dirty. She yanked off her apron, threw it over the body, picked up the bleeding mass, exclaiming, with an awful oath:

"What are you gaping at? Get out the way!"
Then she stalked off with the dripping load.

The police enquired into the case. They searched her rooms. They came across a pair of diamond earrings. She would give no explanation about them. She hadn't wiped the blood of her child off

her hands, but was drinking liquor out of a bottle, and held a pipe in her gory fist.

The mangled child's remains were removed.

That night they came and carted away a woman dead drunk, rags on her body, diamonds in her ears.

THE END.

